



# Memories of Hitler's Nuremberg

*by Ludwig Berlin*



**Ludwig Berlin at age 11 in 1932**

(photo: private)

## **Editor's note**

The following text was transcribed from a copy of Ludwig Berlin's story made in May 2006 by his niece Navina Clemerson (New Zealand). She added the following biographical information for a better understanding of the narrative:

- Dr. jur. Walter Berlin, born Nuremberg 1887, died London 1963
- Rose Berlin, nee Windesheim (Walter's wife), born Erfurt 1899, died London 1983
- Ludwig Berlin (Walter and Rose's son), born Nuremberg 1921
- Ann Gerzon (Walter and Rose's daughter), born Nuremberg 1923, died Haifa 2002

We thank Ludwig Berlin and Navina Clemerson for making available the text to us.

## **Table of contents**

Introduction

The early years

The First World War and its aftermath

Primary school

The Gymnasium

The publishing house

1932 and after

Hitler comes to power

1938 - Emigration looms

The family

---

## **Introduction**

Forty years have passed since the events that shaped my life. Before the memories finally fade, I want to record them.

I was born in Nuremberg in 1921, the only son of a Jewish lawyer. In 1933 Hitler came to power and our lives changed. In January 1939, at the age of seventeen, I left Germany forever.

I have tried to tell this story as I remember it. No doubt some of the facts have slipped from my grasp and my memory may occasionally deceive me. But of one thing I am sure: this was how it felt to grow up in the Nuremberg of the nineteen twenties and thirties in a middle class Jewish family long rooted in Germany, whose existence was gradually destroyed but who escaped with their lives before the Holocaust could overtake them. That is something one does not forget.

*Ludwig Berlin, London, 1961*

---

## **The early years**

Birthplaces given in our family tree link at least eleven successive generations to southern Germany, the last seven to the district of Franconia of which Nuremberg is the principal town. These eleven generations span over three hundred years. They were the descendants of the survivors of the pogroms which had accompanied the Crusades and the Black Death when Jews were accused of poisoning the wells.

Beyond that all is mist and conjecture; but at the beginning, there was Judah, Jacob's son. This knowledge has been handed down to me by my father, who had it from his father, who had it from his, and so through four thousand years and over a hundred generations.

Barred from the larger towns, excluded from craft guilds and forbidden to own land, the Jews who survived the pogroms made their living from trade or sharpened their minds by religious studies. They were also determined individualists and by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some had been able to overcome these obstacles and were men of distinction and substance.

In the nineteenth century, under the influence of the ideas of the French revolution, Germany's Jews were gradually freed from legal restrictions. Centuries of trial had heightened their capacity for original thought and individual enterprise. Within a few decades, Germany's half a million Jews - less than one percent of the population - had become prominent in the country's commercial, industrial, scientific and cultural life. This brought the behaviour of every Jew under resentful scrutiny.

Nor were the Jews without their full share of human frailty. Some carried success with insufficient modesty; some had forgotten whence they came.

It is, nevertheless, my belief that in the achievements of the now vanished German-speaking Jewry mankind reached one of its highest peaks. If anyone doubts this, let him examine a list of Nobel Prize winners.

In our family, businessmen alternated with professional men generation after generation. The family tree shows traders and court financiers, rabbis and later, advocates and judges.

My father, Dr. jur. Walter Berlin, was a lawyer. His clients were mostly commercial and industrial firms. He also sat on the supervisory boards of a number of companies.

After the Nazis came to power, the nature of his practice changed. Some of his non-Jewish clients withdrew their patronage. Others he had to advise that it was not to their advantage to be represented by a Jewish lawyer, since this might prejudice their cases. His position on supervisory boards became untenable.

Instead, his clients were now mostly fellow Jews whose interests he tried to defend. When he appeared in the Nuremberg law courts (the very building where ten years later the tribunal of the Allies tried and convicted the leading Nazi criminals) he was ostracised in the corridors by many of his fellow lawyers with whom he had previously been on good terms.

Nevertheless, he usually won his cases. This was due, I believe, partly to his tactical ingenuity in finding the most acceptable line of defence in the prevailing climate; partly to the force of his personality; and partly to the inner preference of many judges for the rule of law in the early years of Nazi power.

The skyline of Nuremberg is dominated by its stark, thousand-year old castle. The house of my parents lay amid gardens on its northern slopes. In winter we could see the castle's roofs and towers through the branches of the trees in our garden. In summer, they were hidden by the crowns of the two great chestnut trees - one bloomed red, the other white - an oak tree, sycamores and above all, the beautiful copper beeches under whose low, climbable branches the snowdrops used to break through in February.

The great old trees exerted a powerful attraction. I spent many hours in their crowns, forcing myself to climb higher and higher until the thin branches near the top could barely support my weight, or hiding among the foliage to escape the consequences of some misdemeanour, such as the protests of the bald-headed passer-by at whom I had aimed glass marbles from a top floor window.

The garden with its great lawn, its roses and irises and surrounding trees and bushes was the centre of my childhood and that of my younger sister Ann. Sometimes, on a spring morning, when I saw the sky lighten and heard the birds outside my bedroom window, I felt so glad that my heart seemed to ache.

Occasionally, when we played on the lawn, we heard a deep distant roar which came nearer and nearer until it filled the sky. Suddenly, the Zeppelin appeared over the castle whose towers almost seemed to scrape its silver belly. There may have been others of these airships but we always called it *the* Zeppelin. Quite slowly it flew over the garden. We waved at the people who looked down from the windows of the gondola until it disappeared northwest on its way to America. We kept on listening until the last sound had died away.



**The Berlins' house and garden in Nuremberg, mid-1930s**

(photo: private)

A nanny looked after my sister and me and took us for walks around the old town. From the ramparts of the castle we looked down on the profusion of red-gabled houses from which church spires rose with roofs of patina green. Dray horses, hardly disturbed yet by car or lorry, pulled loads of beer barrels up the cobbled streets. Peasant women sold vegetables from stalls in the market square. Tramcars, in their elegant olive green liveries, glided along the main thoroughfares.

The castle's medieval torture chamber was popular with sightseers and the guide took pride in demonstrating the mechanics of the Iron Virgin, a hollowed mould whose shape could accommodate an upright human body. The inside of its door was fitted with huge iron spikes. When the door was closed, the guide explained, the spiked would drive into the victim. How grateful I was not to live in such barbarous times.

Every Monday was washday, I sat on an upturned tub as the washerwoman, her arms deep in suds, talked of life in *peace-time*, the years before the First World War. For her, peace-time had not returned. In later years, after the Nazis had come to power and middle class German friends and acquaintances turned away from us overnight, she remained steadfast in her friendly concern for our family.

But that was still far in the future and meanwhile we lived happily as season followed season. Each Easter a horse-drawn cart would pull up outside the house with a load of golden sand which was then wheeled through the garden to replenish our sandpit. Spring had arrived; we discarded our winter boots and put on sandals.

From June onwards a great excitement took hold of me. The holiday season was approaching and I spent my time assembling, packing and re-packing my belongings. My boots were taken to the shoemaker to be nailed. Holidays meant the mountains and lakes of Upper Bavaria, small, onion-domed churches and the sound of cow bells high upon Alpine meadows.

My parents like to stay at simple inns, usually by the side of an icy lake, which took only a few guests. The wood-panelled walls and furniture smelled of fir and unlimited helpings of butter were spread on great slices of dark bread.

My father used to take me on long climbs in the mountains. With knapsack, walking stick and map we set out at dawn. At noon we stood at some high peak from which the eye could gaze on range upon snow-capped range into the limitless distance. By dusk we were back at the inn, for a swim in the lake.

As darkness fell on Christmas Eve, while my mother and the maids were bustling about with decorations and preparations, my father used to take my sister and me to Nuremberg's market square, where toy makers, bakers and confectioners sold their wares from row upon row of small, well-lit booths. Bells rang out from the many churches and if winter was early snow would cover the steep roofs.

We walked through the lanes between the booths stopping here and there. If my father saw a child longingly looking at some toy quite beyond his means, he bought it and put it into the child's hands in the simplest and most natural manner, speaking to the child in the rough Franconian dialect into which we frequently fell at home.

By the time we returned home, the Christmas tree was decorated (though without any religious symbols), the candles were lit and the presents spread on the carpet beneath.

Judaism as a religion was hardly practised in our house. The Jewish dietary laws were not observed; neither were they observed by my grandparents or great-grandparents. They must have fallen into disuse many generations ago. On two days towards the end of each September I went to synagogue to mark the New Year and the Day of Atonement. The interminable and complicated service, its tedium relieved only by the Cantor's glorious baritone voice, washed over me. I passed the time reading passages from the Bible quite unconnected with the day's proceedings, or looking round at the girls. The only time my attention was fully engaged was when the congregation broke into the ringing declaration: *Shema Israel Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echod* (Hear, O Israel, the Lord Our God, the Lord Is One).

At home after the service, my parents would discuss the merits of the rabbi's sermon.

My father never tolerated an anti-Semitic remark in his presence, even if it was only the kind of unthinking jibe that Gentiles quite naturally weave into their everyday conversation, without calling the offender to task or abruptly leaving the company.

### **The First World War and its aftermath**

When the First World War broke out in 1914, Germany's Jews shared the ecstatic patriotism of their fellow citizens. Jewish men put on the field grey uniform. Because of their good education many became officers and the casualty rate was high. Jewish matrons invested in war loans and gave up their gold wedding rings for iron ones. Perhaps they felt the need for a special commitment. The hem is stronger than the cloth.

When after Germany's defeat in 1918, the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were announced, my mother's father - a man of iron self-discipline - broke into tears.

The early 1920s were still under the overwhelming impression of the First World War. Whenever the name of an adult man came up in conversation, he would be described not merely by his occupation, such as doctor or carpenter, but also by the role he had played in the war. *He was a captain in the cavalry*, it would be said, or *he was severely wounded at the Somme*.

Father often talked to me about his war experiences. He had commanded a battery of field guns and served on the Western Front from the first day to the last. When he took me for

Sunday walks among the fields and forests of Nuremberg's surrounding countryside, he would sometimes stop, gaze into the landscape and say *This would be an excellent artillery position*. Or he would reflect: *Ten years ago today began the battle of Verdun*.

Soon I knew the names and dates of all the battles on the Western Front and pressed him with questions: *Why did the March offensive of 1918 fail? After Russia had dropped out of the war, all the German troops had been moved from the East to the West*.

*Well, there were a number of reasons*, he replied, *but the most important one was the lack of material. For example, we did not have enough copper. Therefore, we did not have enough telephone wire and our forward observers could not direct the battery fire by telephone. Our guns were firing blind. That was the result of the blockade. The British controlled the seas and cut off our supplies*.

I still have his various ribbons and medals, full of crosses, crowns and swords. I keep them in a tea caddy of old-fashioned design which, perhaps, once was part of a food parcel sent to him by my grandmother.

Sometimes I saw him leave the house in his long, field grey greatcoat to attend a regimental dinner. He was six feet four inches, 1.93 metres, tall and, with the sword hanging from his side and spiked ceremonial helmet on his head, he seemed to me a mighty figure.

This must have been in the mid-twenties. Thereafter, the dinners became rarer and rarer and eventually ceased. The greatcoat, uniforms, sword and helmet remained in a separate cupboard in the basement. When I opened it, a strong smell of mothballs came out.

There was a sequel to this story of the uniforms. Some years later, in the summer of 1934, I reached the age of thirteen and celebrated my Bar Mitzvah. I was to be received into the Jewish faith as a son of the law.

The Nazis had then been in power for eighteen months. Insults and harassment had become part of our lives. However, on that Saturday morning in June, all this was put aside.

I put on my dark suit, instead of the Tyrolean shorts and ornamented leather braces which I usually wore during the summer and, with parents and sister, walked slowly through the streets of Nuremberg on one of my rare visits to the synagogue. The domed building had been erected in the 1870s at a time of growing Jewish optimism and prosperity and contrasted with the surrounding gables and soaring spires.

Under the benevolent eye of the Rabbi, I put a prayer shawl around my shoulders, stepped up to the pulpit and from the Bible scroll read aloud a passage in Hebrew. I did not know the language, but had learned the passage phonetically by heart. What it was about I have long forgotten, but not forgotten is the feeling of time and continuity, the vision of generation after generation of boys facing the congregation across the Bible scroll, somewhere in the world.

In the afternoon, friends and relatives came to our house. Among the presents of books, watches, inkstands and tie pins were also a few which were more suited to my age, notably an airgun. I went into the garden and tried to shoot the chestnuts in their green capsules off the tree; however, they were unripe and would not fall.

Then I had a better idea. I fetched my father's ceremonial helmet and put it on top of a small laundry pole in the garden. Taking careful aim, I emptied a whole box of the small lead bullets at the splendid target until it was torn to shreds. Suddenly I saw my father and my heart stopped. He had been watching for quite a while and his face was thoughtful. However, he said nothing, turned around and went back into the house. Not many years before he had been wearing this helmet with pride.

If the words *World War* were a dominant theme, they were in the nineteen-twenties matched by another: *inflation*.

World war, men fighting, that was something I could understand; but what could the vague term *inflation* mean? In my mind's eye I saw it as a dangerous all pervasive mist, such as the poison gas on the Western Front I had heard about.

*They have lost everything through the inflation.* How often did I hear this sentence. I imagined an old couple sitting in their chairs helplessly looking at each other.

Father at the time was a young lawyer trying to make his name. His income came from fees whose fixed rates limped far behind the rate of inflation.

The purchasing power of the German mark plunged day after day. The new rate was officially announced each noon. In mid-morning, my mother would hurry to father's office in town to collect whatever payments had come in and then on to the shops to buy the day's food before noon. The same amount of money might buy a meal in the morning, a loaf of bread in the afternoon, a roll the day after.



**Ludwig with his parents Rose and Walter on winter holidays in the Alps, approx. 1927**  
(photo: private)

My grandmother, my father's mother, became one of the victims of inflation. Her husband had died young, but had left her a considerable fortune which she had invested in government stock, including war loans. One day the investments were found to be worthless. Father supported her and she did not have to make the unheard of sacrifice of dismissing her cook.

My father was a skilful and imaginative card player. On Wednesday evenings, he customarily met his friends for a game of *Skat*, the German card game traditionally reserved for men. They had known each other since their student days and took turns in playing at each other's houses. Their wives vied with each other in providing good fare.

Occasionally, when play was at our house, I was invited to watch, on the mistaken assumption that I could learn the game by looking on. With good-natured banter and plenty of absurd but

time hallowed stock phrases, the cards were triumphantly thumped down on the table or quietly flicked across with pretended nonchalance while beer, bread and sausages were consumed in quantities. My father loved to run outrageous risks for the chance of a spectacular result and met triumph and disaster with equal good humour. sometimes he dragged his partners down with him to heavy defeat and they withheld their wholehearted approval. This by no means deterred him from taking an even greater risk with the next hand.

Among the card friends was K-, a manufacturer in a modest way of business and a non-Jew. They had been playing together for twenty-five years. After the Nazis came to power, he withdrew from the card circle. Some months later my father came home and reported: *Today I met K- in the street. We were on the same pavement and walking towards each other. It was broad daylight and not many people were about. He looked straight ahead and went past me without a greeting or the slightest acknowledgement.*

He went on: *I know the pressure people are under. K-'s business is not going well. Perhaps he relies on orders from public authorities. He has a family to keep. I cannot be sure what I would do under the circumstances. Perhaps I would also have withdrawn from our card evenings. I hope not, but I can't guarantee it. But of one thing I am certain, quite certain: Never, under any circumstances, would I have gone past a friend without greeting him.*

This story took place in about 1935. There is a corollary to it. Ten years later the war was over and Germany had been defeated. My father, then living as a refugee in London, received a letter from K-, who referred to their old friendship and asked for my father's confirmation that he, K-, had not been a Nazi. My father wrote back: *I do not know whether you were a Nazi or not. However, of one thing I am certain: you were not a friend.*

My grandmother no longer did her rounds of theatres and museums but began to lead a retiring life. As an outlet for her energies she set herself the task of copying by hand the almost daily letters my father had written to her, in his barely legible scrawl, from the front during the Great War. I still have the nine volumes, finely bound in pigskin. Each represents six months of war. They contain altogether 3500 foolscap pages, written in mauve ink in her even, old-fashioned script.

Occasionally I read these sixty-year old letters; I quote from the entry of 10<sup>th</sup> November 1918, the eve of the Armistice, during the retreat of the German armies through Belgium:

*... our artillery has spent the last of its ammunition ... evil news ... there is revolution everywhere in Germany ... the King has abdicated ... the fleet in mutiny ... so, so sad ... needless to say, I hardly slept during the night.*

The last page of the ninth and final volume reads as follows:

*These letters were copied by their recipient in the time from March 1933 to March 1937. She completed the transcription shortly before her seventieth birthday.*

Grandmother always wore black with a touch of mauve. She took pride in her skill at making quince jelly which was offered to visitors in dainty paper cups. Beforehand she stood in the kitchen with an apron round her waist and week after week, year after year, the cook was commanded to watch how good quince jelly was made.

Every Thursday, I lunched with her.

*What do you want for dessert?* she enquired some days before. This put me in an agony of indecision. *Vanilla ice cream with hot chocolate sauce* I replied; *No, I think I prefer strawberries and cream.* On Thursday, both dishes appeared on the table. I thought it wise not to burden my parents with the knowledge of this piece of hedonism.

After lunch we sat down at the card table for a game of bezique which she played earnestly but not well. Though she loved me, she was not pleased when I trumped her aces.

At the bottom of the carved oak cupboard, she kept an enormous Doré Bible which I used to drag out. Sprawling on the carpet, I turned the leaves and studied the engravings of Noah's ark or David and Goliath. I paid particular attention to the numerous scenes which had inspired the artist to depict the fully developed female form in situations of such distress that it had had to shed most of its clothes.

Each week Grandmother would meet her circle of friends for coffee and bridge. The future was mercifully unknown to these harmless old ladies. At the age of seventy-three, my grandmother became a refugee in a foreign land, luckier by far than those of her bridge partners who met their end in Hitler's gas chambers.

### **Primary school**

In 1927, when I was six years old, I started to attend the local primary school, walking past the long fence behind which a fearsome dog ran and barked. The school lay halfway between the gardens and villas on Castle Hill and the newly built workers' settlement on the Northern outskirts and drew its children from all social classes in the district.

In the settlement, neat, plain-fronted flats rose within earshot of the railway good yard and encroached upon the unlovely fields of the flat countryside. Many of the windows lacked curtains and even during the day, listless yet watchful groups of men stood in the doorways.

On my first day at school, the teacher said: *Now I want each of you to stand up and clearly give his name, religion and father's occupation.*

This simple procedure opened new horizons to me, for two reasons. The first was the discovery of a puzzling occupation. Many children stood up to say: *Father's occupation - unemployed.* At home I had to recount my experiences. *Father I asked what occupation is this, unemployed?*

He put down his knife and fork. *These are men who used to get paid for working in factories and shops and with the money they fed and clothed their families. They were employed. Now there is not enough work in the factories, so the owners tell them they are not needed. They have become unemployed.*

I had a vision of a family sitting around a table. The table cloth was laid, the plates, cutlery and napkins were in place, but the dishes were empty.

*Father, can you become unemployed?*

*One can never be certain of the future, but it does not seem likely. I am a lawyer and independent. Nobody can make me unemployed, but it could happen, of course, that in a bad year I may not earn enough money to keep you as comfortable as you are now.*

Barely ten years later, in 1938, he was forbidden by the law of the State to exercise his profession; the door of the century-old law firm was closed forever and he could not earn a livelihood anywhere in Germany.

That conversation took place in 1927. The proportion of children whose fathers were unemployed rose year by year and during the early 1930s it must have been close to one in three or worse.

A boy wiped his nose on his sleeve and was reprimanded by the teacher. *Don't use your sleeve; take your handkerchief. I can't, my handkerchief is in the wash.* He had only one.

One day, two boys were fighting in the schoolyard. One was bullet-headed and barefooted and lived in the settlement. The other's hair was brushed and parted, his clothes neat but threadbare. Neither could have been more than eight years old. They fought not like boys usually fight, pushing, shoving, arm-twisting, catching each other's head in the crook of the arm. No, they fought with total ferocity, hitting with all their might straight in the face, the nose, the teeth. The blood flowed but they were too enraged to care. When one was felled to the ground, the other brought his fists down on the defenceless face. I shrank back and asked one of the other boys in the large crowd that had collected *What are they fighting about? Why, don't you know? This one is a Red, the other one is a Nazi.*

I had a strong sense of being in a privileged position. My mother had instructed the cook not to put cheese or sausage on the buttered rolls I packed into my satchel for elevenses and, even at the young age of six or seven, I prayed inwardly that on our school walks to the castle, the teacher would not take the class past our large house behind the iron gate which made me feel so uncomfortable and guilty.

The second reason why the first morning at school made such a deep impression on me was the reaction of the other children to my religion.

*Religion - Israelite*, I said, and every child in the class turned round to give me a long, curious stare, far more intense than any other child had attracted.

The class time-table allocated two hours a week to religious instruction and I was told to report to a small, quite pretty room under the roof of the school where I joined a handful of children from other forms.

There, a benign middle-aged man, so different from our martinet form-master, told us some extraordinary but strangely true-sounding tales.

*In the cave of Machpelah, near Hebron in the land of Israel, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lie buried. These are your forefathers. They lived a hundred generations ago.*

In my mind formed a picture of an unending chain of reflections, such as I had seen in the trick mirrors of the local fair.

*Strangers thou art in the land of Egypt.* Do I imagine it now, or did he give a special emphasis to these words?

We listened to stories of Pharaohs and kings, of judges and prophets, Assyrians and Babylonians and learnt of the festivals which recall survival from various persecutions by great enemies. Inexplicably, the dates of these festivals coincided with Christmas, Easter and Whitsun.

Our form master was a disciplinarian. My doodles on blotting papers provoked his indignation and the application of the cane to my fingers. An inkblot in the exercise book would disturb my sleep until the matter had been settled by discovery and chastisement. His face flushed and his veins stood out as he wielded his stick. As an instructor, however, he was excellent. Soon we could all read and write and reel off the months of the year and the capitals of Europe.

When he was promoted from teacher to senior teacher he insisted on being addressed by his full title and the plaque on the classroom door was changed to record his higher status.

Occasionally my mother called on him, to enquire after my progress. He clicked his heels, bowed from the waist and gave a favourable report.

In our first school year the class room was decorated with prints from Grimm's fairytales and, when the lessons became too tedious, the eye could surreptitiously gaze at the familiar figures of Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and assorted stepmothers and witches.

When we were a little older, linen cloth maps of Germany were occasionally unfurled in furtherance of our geographical and historical knowledge. The teacher would sadly and indignantly point to the specially coloured areas which Germany had had to cede to France, Poland and Denmark under the Treaty of Versailles.

On the last day of term, he made a concession to the holiday mood and one of the bright boys would read to the class from some specially selected book extolling the valour of German arms during the First World War. It dealt invariably with some particularly heroic episode, some exploit of aviators or U-boat captains or daring reconnaissance raid. No mention was made of millions of dead and no story ever went beyond March 1918, the high water mark of the German advance into France. The teacher could not bear to hear of Germany's defeat.

Each morning I went to school with trepidation. When I approached the building, often that one vital minute late, I could hardly bear to raise my eyes to the malevolent clock face. The bell rang like the voice of doom.

Each spring our form teacher handed us an official form headed *collections for Germans settled abroad*. Relatives indulgently put their hands in their pockets, signed their names and entered the amount of their contribution. Shopkeepers whom I unwittingly blackmailed in my enthusiasm were less entranced. I was puzzled why the small pear-shaped widow who kept the dairy shop which supplied us with mild and butter heaved such a sigh each time I bounced into her shop with my collection list.

Ma ambition was to collect the biggest sum of all the boys in the class. Little did I suspect that many of the Germans who had settled abroad, notably in South America, were fervent Nazis and that the funds from the collection would eventually be used to subvert the governments of their host countries.

On fine mornings during the spring and summer, a special excitement ran through the class. If the school thermometer rose above 25 degrees Centigrade in the shade, we would be sent home and the school closed for the rest of the day.

With what eagerness did I welcome the appearance of the school janitor with the joyful news and with what relief did I go home, to sit on the swing behind the clump of fir trees in the garden.

To lean back, to kick one's legs, to fly towards the blue sky, to be officially allowed to do nothing except listen to the rhythmic squeaking of the swing and the droning bumble bees among the flowers with the unending afternoon still to come - surely no bliss could be more complete.

At times I caused disquiet at home by returning from school several hours late. I had spent the time playing football in the deep moat with its perpendicular walls which surrounded the town. It now gave space to allotment gardens and long stretches of bare ground. There, all around the town, small boys were kicking dozens of footballs and achieved intricate passing movements off the walls. During this period, the Nuremberg football team in its claret coloured jerseys were five times German champions and their triumphant home-coming could be seen from the window of my father's office. One Sunday, Father took the family for lunch in the old, low-ceilinged inn which nestled in the shadow of one of the town's great gothic churches and specialised in the small, highly spiced local sausages. There, the team's legendary goalkeeper acted as host and I bought a postcard bearing his picture and autograph. I could hardly wait for Monday morning to dazzle my schoolmates with my acquisition.

Even today, when I pick up a German newspaper, I look up the Nuremberg team's position in the German league.

After I had left primary school, my father insisted that I should visit my old teacher once a year. *You owe a great deal to him. He was always interested in you. A visit is more than politeness, it shows gratitude and loyalty.*

Accordingly, during the Easter holidays, I called on him in the small flat with the dark furniture and reported about my progress in Latin and Greek. He was, indeed, pleased to see me.

Some years later, after the Nazis had come to power, another Jewish boy, a gifted violinist, sat in his form. By then the Nazis had elevated racial knowledge to a subject on the syllabus. The senior teacher decided to give a practical demonstration.

*Come here, you* he said to the boy. *Stand here.* He pointed to a spot in front of the class.

*Now boys, here you can see the formation of the non-Aryan skull. Turn round, you. You can all note the profile, the nose. Observe the formation of the ears. Look very closely at these features, boys, and never forget them. They belong to the enemy of mankind.*

## **The Gymnasium**

In 1931, two years before the Nazis came to power, I entered the local grammar school founded by Philipp Melanchthon, the great sixteenth century German humanist and religious reformer.

The school had a strong classical bias. Entrance was by examination only and a matter-of-course classlessness prevailed. The monthly fee was twenty marks (then worth about a pound sterling in 1931) which I used to hand to the form master in an envelope. Many boys had all or part of their fee remitted.

Among the marble staircases, wide, clean-smelling corridors and functional classrooms the simple principles prevailed that each school year had its syllabus which had to be covered, that historical dates had to be known and Latin and Greek irregular verbs remembered.

The lessons were in fastidious High German. Among ourselves we spoke in the rough Franconian dialect. In summer, school started at half past seven, in winter at eight, but we were expected to be at our desks five minutes earlier. The boys were never late and rarely absent. Most of the afternoons were free.

The senior masters were benign, middle-aged men who knew how to keep order without being heavy-handed. Among them was Dr *Papa* Rast. He had a big stomach with a watch chain and waddled extraordinarily fast. I used to overtake him on my bicycle on the way to school but when I arrived in class, out of breath after my dash from the bicycle shed, he was already at his desk and glanced at me sharply over his pince-nez.

Every term he set us test. *Number the lines on your paper from one to fifty. Now, question one: give the date of the battle of Zama and the name of the victor.*

The correct answer was 202 BC, *Publius Cornelius Scipio Emilianus Africanus Magnus*. This was worth seven points, one for each fact. The following day he returned the corrected papers, in descending order of merit. The low scorers had to sit the test again. By the end of the terms we all knew our facts.

Dr Helmreich taught Latin and Greek. He had caught the spirit of his subject and when he spoke a brighter light seems to spread over the classroom. He spent his holidays in Greece - which must have been difficult at the time on a teacher's salary - and came back with photographs of Delphi and Argos.

Each year, as we moved to a higher form, the ribbon on the school cap was changed. As if to symbolise our widening horizon, the prescribed colour combination progressed from Nurem-

berg's red-and-white town colours in the first year to Bavaria's blue-and-white in the second and the black-red-and-gold of the Weimar Republic in the third.

So two years passed. Then came that day in January 1933 when old President Hindenburg made Hitler Chancellor. Soon the peaceable black-red-gold was banned and replaced by the black-white-red of nationalist Germany.

A different tone began to enter the school. When the teacher entered the classroom in the morning, the boys stood up, raised their arms and shouted *Heil Hitler*. The teacher responded in like fashion. This way of greeting had replaced *good morning*. Anyone who did not use this Nazi greeting was suspected of being a dissident. I was not sure what was expected of me but kept my arms by my side.

There was a boy in our class who also kept his arms by his side. He was a Protestant (as were about half the boys in the class, most of the others being Catholic) and the other boys said that his parents were very religious. He worked hard but his results were only average and he was not particularly good at games. For many months he held out, but in the end he too raised his arm, though slowly and reluctantly, and I never heard him say *Heil Hitler*; he merely moved his lips inaudibly.

When we assembled in the schoolyard, we lined up in military formation and stood to attention in neat ranks of three. Master and boys sang the national anthem, followed by the official Nazi hymn. There they stood, the humanists, who had been brought up on Homer and Horace, and sang the song of the brown-shirted street brawlers, arms aloft in this mindless gesture. The masters stood facing the boys and I could observe their expressions. Most of their faces were blank and their arms were only limply raised. The few Nazi enthusiasts among the masters composed their faces into heroic expressions. Their jaws jutted forward, their eyes gazed sternly into the distance and every sinew of their outstretched arms strained forward and upward.

The Nazis among the masters were second-raters, semi-buffoons without capacity or personality who could neither teach nor keep order. Now they came to the fore. In their lapel they wore the Swastika badge which showed membership of the Nazi party. On speech days they took the platform and harangued the school with bombast about Nazi philosophy while the boys wriggled and the other masters listened with impassive faces.

More and more *Aryan* boys joined the Hitler Youth. Eventually membership became compulsory. Few were fanatical Nazis. Membership of the Hitler Youth was treated as good fun and a welcome change from the tedium of learning. Some of the boys turned up in uniform, ready for parade after school. Lessons were missed and the better masters became unhappy. Papa Rast could not conceal his resentment. The end of the school year was approaching and his class would not complete its syllabus. When the next term starts, he was no longer around. The boys said that he had been retired.

Our periods in the gymnasium took on a military aspect. Our class called itself a troop and exercised with iron staves which we treated as rifles, shouldering and ordering arms, marching, turning and halting to the sharp words of command of the gym master. Later, the iron staves were replaced by wooden dummy rifles. Occasionally, we were taken to a rifle club and practised shooting with small calibre weapons.

The troop I belonged to took its name from a famous First World War U-boat commander with many sinkings to his credit and much thought was expended on the design of an attractive pennon.

The school tradition demanded that each term a day was set aside for a school ramble. This used to be a relaxed saunter through the countryside. Now, however, we were divided into

attackers and defenders and crept on our bellies through sand and gorse while the masters, like umpires at army manoeuvres, decided who was dead or captured.

Each day, I went to school, sat through the lessons and went home again. Soon I moved to the last bench at the back of the class. Nobody told me to do so, it simply seemed the thing to do. Each school bench seated two and I shared mine with Hans, the only other Jewish boy in the class and easily our best mathematician, more gifted than any of the masters. He had built a miniature radio into a small cigarette tin and we listened to faintly audible programmes.

During breaks we kept to ourselves. As we quietly paced up and down the schoolyard, an intangible empty circle seemed to move with us, like a shadow.

The other boys were not hostile and I do not ever recall being attacked or insulted at school, or even feeling particularly disliked. However, they hardly ever drew us into conversation. There was, in any case, little we could have talked about. We shared the same lessons, but no other aspect of our lives.

My greatest difficulty was to know how to behave, what facial expressions to put on. to be polite without appearing familiar, aloof without being truculent. This I found the heaviest burden to bear. I was eleven years old when it started. Looking back, I doubt whether our parents - themselves engaged in a strenuous and hopeless battle for economic survival - fully realised what psychological pressures we were under at school.

The Nazis had cleared a vast expanse of ground on the outskirts of Nuremberg for their annual rallies. Monstrous quantities of stone and concrete and great numbers of flagpoles were used to construct a setting in which Hitler could address his Brown Shirts in their hundreds of thousands.

In 1935, when the project was nearing completion, it was made the subject of a school essay: *Give a description of the Party's Rally Terrain*. A tram ride and short walk took me into the area where I inspected the dreary blocks and slabs, the stone steps, parapets and serried flagpoles. I paced out the distances and estimated the angles.

The essay I handed in consisted of a precise physical description of what I had seen, in the simplest and clearest German I could muster. Nowhere did the words National Socialism, Party, Brown Shirts or *Führer* occur. The other boys took the essay as an occasion to regurgitate Nazi slogans and propaganda. They thought it a safe way to high marks.

The form master, indeed, awarded top marks to an essay full of Nazi bombast. My essay came second. A few days later he had an announcement to make. *The headmaster has read your essays and instructed me to reverse the first two places*. He then asked me to read my essay to the class. The headmaster's name was Dr. Staehlin. Honour to his memory.

Although I was never harassed by boys from my own school, I had unwittingly attracted the attention of a group of half-a-dozen boys on bicycles from another school. They knew where I lived and where I went to school. As far as I know, I had never set eyes on them.

They tried to waylay me on the way home. Sometimes they waited outside the school gate, but by taking different routes and thanks to my speed on the bicycle, I managed to elude them until, one rainy day, they pounced out of a side street and gave chase. We raced through the streets until, taking a sharp corner, my bicycle slipped on the wet cobblestones and I fell heavily. I dragged it into a nearby courtyard and hid behind the open wing of an iron gate. The group was searching and coming nearer. Finally the protecting gate was pulled back to reveal me to a delighted pursuer. *I've got him!* he shouted to his friends who hurried along and pressed around me.

The leader hit me in the face. *That's for being a Jew* he said, *and that's for running away; do you think we've got nothing better to do with our time?* He was so carried away that he could not stop hitting. His eyes were full of joy. *Why-don't-you-go-to-Palestine* he said, accompanying each word with a blow. The others appealed to their leader: *Don't be selfish. Leave something for us. Let us have a go!* They queued up and took turns at punching while I gritted my teeth and tried not to cry. Finally one of them said *I think we can let him go now. Let the Arabs cut his throat.*

I took my bicycle and rode home. My father complained to the education authorities but the culprits were not found. For weeks afterwards I did not enter our house by the front gate but lifted my bicycle over a neighbour's fence and so reached our garden from the back.

Considerable tensions existed between the various authorities of the Nazi state, notably between the Nazi Party and the government departments. For instance, there was bitter enmity between Julius Streicher, the bullying Nazi *Gauleiter* of Franconia and Dr. Martin, the chief of police of Nuremberg, it's principal town.

Dr. Martin was an academic - I imagine he was a doctor of jurisprudence - who had become a professional civil servant and risen to the level of police president. During the Great War, he and my father had been comrades, after it, boon companions. When the Nazis came to power he chose not to sacrifice his career and livelihood. As police president he eventually was given the rank of General of the SS.

However, he used his office, not without risk to himself, to mitigate our obstruct Streicher's excesses and many Jews, as well as Catholic clergy, became indebted to him. My father sometimes went to him for help in desperate cases; I believe this included the immediate issue of passports to people in acute danger.

On one occasion when the street in which we lived had been sealed off and my father was in danger of imminent arrest by the Brown Shirts, Dr. Martin posted police guards near our house to prevent their approach. My parents preserved such calm that I had no idea that something untoward was afoot. That must have been in about 1934. I only learned about it years later. What we could not know was that in 1941 the same Dr. Benno Martin supervised the transport of Nuremberg's remaining Jews to the death camps in the East.

When I look back on those years, their most remarkable feature was the serenity which pervaded our home and that of other Jewish families that I knew. This was partly due to the strength of character of the older generation; partly to a merciful ignorance of the full enormity of what was to come; partly to a feeling of disdain for the nation of poets and thinkers - as it liked to call itself - which, with honourable exceptions, had welcomed or at least submitted to the suspension of reason. In the greater part, however, this serenity was due to something else: We knew exactly where we stood and felt no guilt and no regrets.

The delusion was over. German Jewry's tight act between surviving as an identifiable group and forming an accepted part of the majority of society had come to an end.

No life of the most exemplary rectitude, no heap of medals in a tin box, no amount of Nobel Prizes, no contribution to German name or fame, no creation of vast enterprises which gave employment to thousands, could weigh in the balance against the element of strangeness. It was too great. *Strangers thou art in the Land of Egypt.*

There was a path which had been attempted by some Jews over the previous half-century. To abandon their religion, to abjure all tradition, to break faith with the hundred generations who had handed it down through Countless disasters, to submerge and dissolve in the mass of the German population: that path was now closed. In any case, most Jews, even if they had gone part of the way had found the full price too high to pay.

When December came, the candles we lit in our house were no longer those on the Christmas tree, but on the eight-armed candelabra. It fell to me, as the eldest son, to perform this task which commemorated Judaism's successful revolt against the despotic successors of Alexander the Great over two thousand years ago.

As the isolation of Jewish boys and girls at school increased and our interest in our studies declined, we formed our own sports club. Goal posts were put up, a running track was laid down and a gymnasium equipped. Between the ages of twelve and seventeen there was hardly a day which did not see me on the sports-ground playing football or tennis or running or throwing things. On summer weekends, since we were no longer admitted into public swimming pools, we went on bicycle excursions in the countryside and swam in the rivers. In winter, we went skating and skiing. We were free of all pressures and tensions. The level of our performances in the measurable sports such as running, improved steeply. This hardening stood me in good stead in later years. We no longer spent our holidays in Bavaria but breathed for a few weeks the free air of Switzerland.

Four years went by. At school, I maintained a reasonable standard in my studies but each year I found it more difficult to concentrate and eventually I lost interest. No university in Germany was going to admit me. All professions would be barred.

The Nazis through the education authorities which they controlled, pressed the school to expel its half dozen Jewish pupils. *Der Stürmer*, prominently displayed in its glass showcases at street corners, urged in banner headlines to *cleanse the schools from Jews*. We had a new headmaster by then. He made the situation plain to my parents. Even the old headmaster would have been powerless. At Easter 1937, a few months before my sixteenth birthday, I left. My final report said: *He leaves the school of his own free will*.

When eighteen months later, the law of the German State finally and officially expelled Jewish pupils from all schools, hardly any remained on whom it could be brought to bear.

### **The publishing house**

My father discussed the situation with me: *You are still too young to emigrate. Eighteen, I think, is a better age. Then you'll go to America and work hard. Your first concern then will be to send for your sister. But that is still several years away. Meanwhile, how would you like to work in the business of your uncle Robert?*

I felt uneasy. This orderly planning seemed unrealistic. Events were moving too fast. I could not however, put my vague doubts into words; so I concurred: *That seems a good idea, Father.*

*I've already talks it over with him. He'll be very happy to have you. You'll start after Easter. It will give you a chance to learn something about commerce.*

Uncles Robert, Gustav and Ernest were the owners of a big publishing house and printing works of children's books. Although I called them uncles, the family relationship was distant but the friendship was close and the ties were strong.

I adapted to office life slowly and painfully. How difficult I found it to rise at six and to be punctual at seven. Our maid was reluctant to wake me: *You need your sleep more than they need you*, she said in her country dialect. She had been with us for many years and was well into middle age - under the Nazi racial laws Jewish households were not allowed to employ female domestic servants younger than forty-five.

I leapt on my bicycle and raced through the suburbs. The wail of the works siren reached my ears while I was still several turnings away. As my first task each morning I had to open the mail and mark each item with the date and exact time of day, down to the nearest fifteen min-

utes. This was done by means of an elaborate rubber stamp, complete with clock-face along which a rubber arrow had to be moved. Breathless, guilty and clumsy, I often moved either the arrow or the date figures backwards rather than forward and made but a negative contribution to the orderly start of the day.

My efforts at filing were also not wholly successful. My zeal exceeded my comprehension. All sorts of papers which I found around the office were indiscriminately swept into my filing system. On one alarming occasion, when an important customer complained that a big order was overdue, the unexecuted order was found after a frantic search, stowed away on the shelves under my charge. These first steps in the field of commerce were not helped by the atmosphere in the office where all the people, apart from the three owners were, in the parlance of the Third Reich, Aryans. Most of the staff had been with the company for years, if not decades. Now the state had become openly hostile to their employers.

The best of the staff were not Nazis. High professional competence and strong Nazi sympathies rarely went together. I had already observed this with my teachers at school. However, they were powerless. The most they could do was to show their undiminished personal loyalty to the uncles.

Among the less competent office staff were the misfits and the intriguers. The middle-aged spinster in the book-keeping department, the obese materials buyer who believed he had been unfairly passed over for promotion, these were the people with whom I had to weigh every word and guard every gesture. The threat of denunciation was unspoken but ever-present.

I found their verbal needling and meaningful glances hard to bear. Often, when I entered a room, there was a sudden silence. I sought opportunities to go on outside errands. To stand in the post office queue was relaxation and to walk round the town with the monthly envelopes for the firm's pensioners was freedom itself, particularly when the old people invited me in for coffee and gossip. I exchanged my current news - or such news as I thought safe to divulge - against their reminiscences of office romances and misdemeanours of the present staff in their younger days.

Occasionally I escaped to the dispatch department where kindly men in brown overalls wrapped innumerable parcels with marvellous dexterity or I sat on a pile of books in the stockroom listening to the head storekeeper, a cheerful, sturdy working-class Bavarian who had been with the firm for thirty years. He took great pride in the superior education of his son who had become an army officer and always brought the conversation round to his achievements.

Very few of the craftsmen were rabid Nazis. The men who operated the printing machines or bent over the heavy lithographic stones worked with skill and dignity. Their lives revolved around their work and their families. Politics were no concern of theirs.

This was a time when orders were hard to get. Retailers - and particularly the buyers of the big department store chains which are so important in Germany - were hesitant and afraid to stock books which bore the imprint of a Jewish publisher; home market sales were declining.

The uncles then directed their attention to the export markets. Although Germany desperately needed foreign currency, the Nazi authorities through administrative chicanery withheld or delayed their passports so that opportunities for sales trips abroad were severely restricted. The business was being strangled.

As the year 1937 drew towards a close, it became clear that my short commercial apprenticeship was already coming to an end.

According to a new German law, the heads of any publishing firm had to belong to the German Chamber of Literature, an organisation founded and run by the Nazis. Jews were not ad-

mitted as members. The uncles could not, therefore, lawfully carry on their business and were forced to look for a buyer.

They were by no means the only ones. Jewish owners of businesses of all types were being forced to sell out. Most of these companies were fundamentally healthy, but Nazi chicanery was throttling their turnover. It was a splendid buyers' market. The purchasers knew that the Jews were forced to sell and that any delay would lower the price still further.

Eventually, the business was sold to another publishing house. The chairman of the new owners had procrastinated for a while before closing the deal: *Let the Jews wriggle*, he had said. The uncles received an artificially depressed purchase price. Of this, the German state took 94 % in tax.

In January 1938, the new managing director moved in. The obese materials buyer went to him: *You ought to be grateful to me. If it were not for me, the Jews would still be sitting here.* To which action of his he attributed this commendable state of affairs I do not know, but his words did not bring him any advantage. The new owners did not want to have on their staff people of proven disloyalty. Possessing the most unimpeachable Aryan credentials, they felt themselves in a strong enough position to sack the fat buyer.

The uncles appeared in the office once or twice more, then came no more. I lingered on for two months, but at the end of March 1938 I left the firm I had joined barely a year before.

During the months of negotiations for the sale of the firm, at the end of which the uncles put their signatures to the loss of their life's work and livelihood, I do not recall ever seeing them other than good-humoured and cheerful. Whether this was due to pride and self-control or to a feeling of disdain, or to the ready expectations of injustice which every Jew carried within him, I do not know. Perhaps they felt relief at laying down an intolerable burden; perhaps also their minds were already focused on the task of starting a new life abroad. No doubt they derived comfort from the attitude of their senior staff who now had to serve new masters but never broke faith with the old ones.

Gustav, the head of the firm, found refuge in Belgium which, two years later, was attacked and occupied by Germany. One day, instead of remaining in hiding, he unwisely went out. His wife waited but he did not return. He had been taken off a tram and sent to a concentration camp where he was put to death.

Uncle Robert and his family went to Paris, to start anew. He was not a handsome man, but he had a beautiful speaking voice, elegant movements and an irreverent sense of humour and he liked and understood people. When he was in a room, the temperature seemed to rise by several degrees. In Paris, he fell in love with a beautiful woman. When the city was occupied by the Germans, he could not or would not leave her. His wife would not leave him. So Robert and his wife were caught and disappeared. The two teenage children, a girl and a boy, went under cover in the French countryside, protected by French families. At the end of the war, news reached them that their father had been seen alive in Germany. Then silence. One day, they were contacted by a death camp survivor who told them the story.

Their mother had been killed. Under the priorities of the death camp bureaucracy, Robert had not yet been called up for the gas chamber when, in the late winter of 1944/45, the Russian armies were approaching the camp from the East. The SS guards formed the remaining, skeletal, thinly clad inmates into a column and marched them through the snow towards the west. On such marches, stragglers were put to death. Robert helped one of the stragglers, but the effort was too great for him. He was still able to pass on the names and whereabouts of his children so that they could be told of their parents' fate. The collapse of Nazi Germany was only a few weeks away.

Ernest, the third of the uncles and an active and forward-looking man, emigrated to England and successfully rebuilt his life. I visited him from time to time and we talked of the past and the future.

After the war, when the new German government did its best to redress the crimes of its Nazi predecessor, Uncle Ernest visited his old printing works, which after a period of war contracts had resumed the peacetime production of children's books. One of the printers could not forbear from pointing to his big machine and saying to him with pride: *On this machine, I printed the war maps for the Führer's headquarters.* He was a decent man and not a Nazi.

He also heard of the fate of the jolly head storekeeper. He had died of cancer. His son had fallen on the Russian front. The mother had lost her reason and was taken to a mental home.

Uncle Ernest lived to old age and died in London.

### **1932 and after**

In the autumn of 1932, the Nazis suffered a surprising electoral reverse when they lost votes and parliamentary seats. My father took this as a sign that Nazism had begun to recede from its high water mark.

My mother had sounder judgement. She had for some years been suffering from a nagging gallbladder and an operation for its removal was considered advisable but not essential. Such an operation was quite a serious one at the time and the decision was left to her. She said to my father: *I must have this operation. Some terrible event is moving towards us and I shall need all my strength.* The operation turned out to be fully successful.

Six years later, in the autumn of 1938, when my father was on his way to a concentration camp and my sister and I were helpless, she saved the family by the clarity of her mind and power of decision.

Streicher had long promoted his anti-Semitic, pornographic sheet *Der Stürmer* by displaying it in glass-fronted showcases at street corners or outside pubs run by Nazi sympathisers. Behind the glass, the pages were fastened to a wooden backing board by drawing pins.

These showcases now appeared in more and more locations. One of them stood at the tram stop fifty yards from our house and while I waited, I studied the latest issue. The front page always carried, at its foot, the slogan *Die Juden sind unser Unglück* (The Jews are our misfortune), in huge letters.

Each issue contained stories, backed by lurid drawings of concupiscent Jews seducing trusting-eyed German girls. Young though I was, I could not quite see where this inexhaustible supply of credulous virgins came from, nor how anyone could believe such nonsense.

Stories of ritual murder provided a second staple theme and appeared, week after week. These had their effect. A boy at school asked me pleasantly: *Is it true that you eat Christian children at Passover?*

*Of course not.*

*Well there must be something in it. My aunt knows someone who was waiting for a tram with a Jewish woman. Well, this woman was carrying a small suitcase and when she tried to get into the tram, she stumbled and dropped the case and the case opened and the body of a small baby fell out.*

Soon, when I looked at any printed page, even if it was the size of a broad-sheet, if the word Jew occurred only once on the page, it would leap out at me within a second.

I began to feel responsible for the actions of every Jew in the whole world. When I witnessed a Jew being noisy, or ostentatious, or tactless, I winced inwardly. When somewhere a particularly unpleasant crime had been committed, my first reaction was: *I hope to God the fellow wasn't a Jew*. If I myself was guilty of a faux pas, real or imagined, the thought haunted me for days.

In 1932, when I was eleven years old, I sensed that the immemorial anti-Semitism which gentiles drink in with their mother's milk and which most Jews, with wry detachment, regard as a fact of life, had taken on a more strident tone.

More and more often, the cobbled streets reverberated with the sound of marching columns of brown-shirted, jack-booted storm troopers with visor caps and swastika armbands, chanting their slogans and singing the catchy Nazi songs which afterwards ran through my head. Their message was plain enough: *Die Straße frei den braunen Bataillonen* (Clear the streets for the brown battalions) and *Heute gehört uns Deutschland und morgen die ganze Welt* (Today we have Germany and tomorrow we'll have the world).

When the Brown Shirts thought they discerned a Jew among the passers-by on the pavement, the whole column looked directly at him and the voices rose to a baying note: *Deutschland erwache! Juda verrecke!* (Germany awake! Judah perish!) or *Wenn das Judenblut vom Messer spritzt* (When the Jewish blood spurts from the knife- Known as the *Horst Wessel Song*). The latter was a particular favourite in the Nazi hymn book.

### **Hitler comes to power**

The big lawn in our garden lent itself perfectly to football and attracted the boys from the neighbouring houses and shops. The two fat sons of the baker at the corner never missed the chance of a game. The turf could not stand up to the efforts of a dozen pairs of boots. Frequently, an ill-directed shot would cut through the surrounding flowers and bushes and our impatient retrieval of the ball added to the destruction. Sometimes our exuberance was briefly subdued by the remonstrating gardener or by the appearance of one of my parents at a window. Eventually, a ban was imposed but imperfectly observed and enforced. Then the problem was solved in an unexpected fashion.

I had developed a passion for collecting cigarette coupons, green bits of paper with red serial numbers. When enough coupons had been assembled one could take them to a tobacconist and eventually the postman would bring a parcel from the cigarette company, containing multi-coloured picture cards of the magnificent uniforms of the pre-War Imperial German Army. These could be stuck into a special album.

Having pestered my father for many months to favour the appropriate cigarette brand, I was, at last, in possession of enough coupons and, in the late afternoon of Tuesday the 30<sup>th</sup> of January 1933, I presented myself at the shop of our local tobacconist in order to complete the necessary formalities. I was eleven years' old.

The usually quiet shop was the scene of much excitement and activity. This could hardly be due to routine tobacco purchases by men dropping in on their way home from work. The excitement emanated from the radio. I had never before heard a radio switched on in a shop. The tobacconist was in animated conversation with his customers and the customers were talking amongst each other.

*Well, now at last he can show what he can do*, said one.

*I don't begrudge him his chance*, added another.

As I left the shop I ran into my father who was on his way home.

*Have you heard?* I asked him. *Hitler has been made Reichs Chancellor.*

He stopped and laughed, half incredulously: *You're joking.*

*No, it's true. It's been on the radio.*

My father had been able to persuade himself that the Nazi tide had turned. That hope was now dashed. The honest Weimar Republic had foundered.

It had foundered on the centuries-old German sense of national under-achievement; on the memory of the Great War, so nearly won and so wholly lost, after such sacrifices; on the economic lunacy of the reparations payments imposed by the Allies in the Treaty of Versailles; and on the chain effect of America's Great Depression.

It had foundered on the radicalisation on the working class, brought to despair by unemployment; on the pauperisation of much of the middle class through inflation; on the disorientation of the aristocracy, deprived of its focus after the Abolition of the monarchy; on the fear of communism of some leading industrialists and on the inability of the fragmented democratic parties to unite.

It had foundered on the lack of encouragement by the older democracies of the West, themselves preoccupied with their own problems.

But above all, the Weimar Republic had foundered on its own lack of will. It was a democracy so perfect, and so weak, that it could not break its rules to ensure its own survival.

So the German nation surrendered itself to government by criminals and perverts who harnessed the German virtues of intelligence, discipline and physical courage to their passion for destruction.

After that January day in 1933, a great change came over our lives. Overnight it seemed - certainly within a week - none of the neighbours' boys came to play football on our lawn. Occasionally I saw them over the fence or in the street but they kept their distance. I found it difficult to know what face to put on. Sometimes I wonder where they are now or in what Russian steppe or African desert their bones lie bleaching.

Soon the scars and bare patches on the lawn were covered by new green grass. The flowers bloomed unharmed, the branches of the shrubs grew unsplintered. Never had our garden been lovelier and never, in our growing isolation, had we made better use of it. On fine Sunday mornings, breakfast was laid on the wrought iron table under the acacia tree and consumed in paradisiacal surroundings. However as the years passed, it became clear that we would have to leave house, Nuremberg and Germany and by 1938, the lawn was left unmown, the gravel paths unraked and weeds grew among the flowers.

Nobody who lived in Germany at the time can truthfully deny the sense of optimism and exhilaration that swept over the country and seized a large part - probably the major part, possibly the overwhelming part - of the population in the early years of Hitler in power. These were the years of falling unemployment (it was falling throughout the world), of the build-up of the German army and the remilitarization of the Rhineland. They seemed to go by in a continuous festival of flags and banners, speeches and marches, rallies and plebiscites.

On Saturday, the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 1933, the town was teeming with marching, singing Brown Shirts. Expectant crowds had collected in the main shopping area. A one-day boycott of Jewish shops had been announced. Identifying posters had been stuck on the doors of Jewish shops overnight. Jack-booted storm troopers had been posted outside and faced the crowd in heroic postures, legs apart, thumbs thrust inside their belt buckles. Some men and women were, nevertheless, brave enough to brush past the Nazi guards and enter the shops. They were photographed by the Nazis.

During this episode, many non-Jewish shops hung out flags which implied the message: *This is a German, not a Jewish shop; you can safely do your shopping here; it will not get you into trouble.* Politically moderate shopkeepers merely displayed the black-white-and-red German national colours.

Fervent Nazis - or those who thought it opportune to jump onto the Nazi bandwagon - flew the swastika flag of the Nazi Party. Many enthusiasts displayed both. The flags fluttered over the streets from poles fixed just below the gables of the beautiful old buildings. It seemed a festival of colour.

When the day was over, the flags were hauled down, but stickers began to appear on the door and windows of non-Jewish shops. These were again of two types. The milder sticker was a replica of the national flag with the words: *German shop.* The other variety displayed the swastika and said: *Jews not desired here.* The owners of some non-Jewish shops had the courage not to display any sticker at all, but these became fewer and fewer. When I went shopping, I always paused at the shop door to see if I would still be admitted as a customer.

As 1937 turned into 1938, my friends and I knew that we would soon leave Nuremberg and Germany. When we met, we ask each other the immemorial questions: *Where will you go? And when?*

This posed problems. The United States had an immigration quota and a waiting list stretching over two years. England, France and most other West European countries still had uncomfortable levels of unemployment and were reluctant to take immigrants. Mussolini's Italy had, as a special present to Hitler, adopted anti-Jewish laws. Eastern Europe was already under the shadow of Nazi Germany - some of its regimes were semi-fascist - and seemed unsafe. Palestine was administered by the British who did not wish to antagonise the native Arabs. Where else? South America? Australia? We were familiar with these problems. It was a marvellous education in political geography.

Many countries would only admit highly qualified doctors, scientists or engineers whose skills could readily be transferred from country to country. Lawyers, such as my father, did not come under this category. Or they insisted that immigrants brought substantial amounts of capital with them. Germany's punitive tax laws - notably the *Reichsfluchtsteuer* (Reichs flight tax) deprived any emigrant Jew of most of his wealth; what remained was subject to exchange controls and difficult to transfer abroad.

England, in the end, proved the most humane.

### **1938 - emigration looms**

My mother said to me: *Before you emigrate, you must get to know Nuremberg. It is after all one of the most beautiful towns in Europe. You know it less than a tourist.*

So we made a plan, walked down the naves of the great Gothic churches whose pealing bells and thrilled me as a child as I lay listening in bed, stood in the market square surrounded by half-timbered houses and visited the museums filled with Germany's past.

I stood on the ramparts of the stark old castle on its sandstone hill and looked out over the spires and gabled roofs; the great, round fortress towers which at intervals guarded the periphery of the medieval inner town; and the cobbled streets which fell away steeply towards the stone bridges over the sluggish river.

Jewish actors, directors and authors had been banned from the German stage soon after Hitler came to power. Heine's Book of Songs had been burned by jeering Brown Shirts in public

pyres because their author - next to Goethe the greatest and most lastingly popular lyric poet in the German language - had been born a Jew.

My father now said to me: *The German language has not done us any harm. Try to acquaint yourself with German literature while you still have the opportunity. Any time you want to go to the theatre, just ask me for the money. I make only one condition: you must read the play first.*

This condition restricted the number of my visits. It also showed that even at this late stage, when everything was darkening around us, my father could not bring himself to acknowledge how little time remained. A performance of Schiller's *Wallenstein* stands out in my memory, together with the power and beauty of German language at its greatest.

A few more months were to go by. Then a law was passed under which Jews were no longer admitted into theatre audiences.

My parents no longer replenished their wine cellar. Instead, they made a plan: they were going to empty it gradually and drink the last bottle on the day they were going to leave Germany for ever. Many evenings, during that winter of 1937/38, they sat in the big leather chairs under the standard lamp with the fringed shade, over a bottle of Hock or Moselle. Occasionally they asked me to join them.

In the early months of 1938, our parents allowed me and my friends to give a number of marvellous parties. Perhaps two dozen of us sat round the splendidly laden tables, laughed, joked and teased each other and drank modest quantities of wine. We were sixteen or seventeen years old.

The carpets were rolled back, the gramophone sprang into life and we danced quicksteps, foxtrots and slow waltzes to the polished lilting music of the good German dance bands, songs about dancing right into heaven (*Ich tanze mit dir in den Himmel hinein, in den siebenten Himmel der Liebe*) or longing under lemon trees. Some of my more enterprising friends brought along records of the latest, lively American hits from Broadway Melody. Our parents watched beaming from the background, then withdrew.

I had begun dancing lessons and moved easily to the rhythm, easily enough to concentrate on my partner of the moment. With Lotte of the blue eyes, Rosemary of the brown eyes and Margot of the green eyes, I danced the night away. Occasionally we would stray into the garden. Light and music poured from the broad windows and the winter night seemed soft and mild.

Many years later, I saw the French film *Un Carnet de Bal*, in which a woman in early middle age, on clearing out a drawer, comes across her first-ever ball card and sets out to find the young men with whom she had danced twenty years before.

My mind went back to the boys and girls who had danced through those winter nights in Nuremberg long ago. Some had gone to Palestine to build up what was to become the State of Israel. Others had been lucky enough to find refuge in England, America or Australia or in some other part of the free Western World. There, some went on to lives of achievement, others sank back into bourgeois self-satisfaction as if nothing had ever happened; others - though physically unharmed - were marked and scarred forever.

Others were less fortunate. They had not managed to escape before the outbreak of war closed Germany's borders in September 1939. Eventually, they were rounded up, deported to a concentration Camp and went to their fate.

Others again, found temporary and illusory asylum. Among them was the freckled smiling boy whom the girls liked so much. He had escaped to Holland, was caught after its invasion by the German armies in 1940 and put to death.

My father had a good friend, a non-Jewish brother officer from the Great War. They had served together in the same regiment on the Western Front from the first day to the very last. This friend had become a judge in northern Germany and was, therefore, a state employee. The two men, now aged about fifty, arranged to meet in the sparsely populated hills of central Germany. For a week, they walked along lonely paths and stayed at isolated inns. They confirmed their friendship and said goodbye.

One evening, in early March 1938, I was on my way home from work when, at a busy intersection, I found it impossible to resist the nearby snack automate where delicious savoury rolls were released from turntables at the cost of a few pfennigs.

Suddenly I caught the sound of marching feet. I looked out through the plate glass window. Column after column of soldiers was marching by and the customers left the automate to join the crowds who were rapidly lining the pavements. These were not soldiers on a training march or on parade, but soldiers on active service, with weapons, big packs and rolled blankets. The traffic had been stopped to allow the field-grey columns to pass. The onlookers on either side of the road watched with intense interest but in nearly total silence. The man next to me said quietly, almost to himself: *Wenn das nur gut ausgeht!* (If only this will end well!)

In the street, several women were clucking over a child in a pram. The infant was old enough to sit up. *Say daddy* urged one of the women. *Da-da* said the child. *Now say mummy*. The child obliged *ma-ma*.

*You've heard nothing yet* said the young mother. *Heil Hitler*, she exclaimed thrusting her right arm over the pram in the Nazi salute. *Helala* the child beamingly responded while waving his arms about. The women clapped their hands and squealed in delight: *What a clever boy! We really must congratulate you, Frau Müller* (or whatever the name was). *That's really fantastic. Mark my words, he'll be an Obersturmbannführer one day.*

Two women were talking in a tramcar. Their shopping bags were full and they were evidently on their way home. They were discussing Hitler. *What a man* said one. *Nine children I'd like to have by him*. The other woman concurred enthusiastically. This conversation, though rather above my head, seemed to have a tinge of the absurd.

One day, on my way home from school, I saw crowds lining the pavement. Soldiers were marching through the street in broad columns and I stayed to watch. The middle-aged man next to me was bursting with pride. *Under the steel helmet, they really all look the same*, he said to his neighbour with immense satisfaction.

These were the years when the Nazis took over every aspect and ramification of German life. Boys, girls, motorcyclists, writers, trade unionists, shopkeepers, all were organised by the Nazis in their image and in their fashion. To stay out was a declaration of not-belonging and was likely to lead to a loss of livelihood, or worse.

It is most certainly not true that the German population was unaware of the existence of the concentration camps. These were fully known to be places of brutality and torture, though in those days of the middle thirties the ultimate refinement of the gas chamber had not yet been devised. Several times, within my hearing, the name Dachau was used as a threat, not only against Jews, but also between Germans, perhaps to clinch some personal initially non-political argument between neighbours or colleagues.

*One more word out of you and you'll find yourself in Dachau!* If this threat came from a man wearing the party badge, the other visibly froze with terror.

The German people knew and, in their great majority, they approved or acquiesced. The courts could not give protection against the midnight knock. To resist needed the kind of courage that is the stuff of martyrs. To stand aside was not to take part in the exciting journey on which the German people were now embarking.

Every second person seemed to acquire a spare-time activity which entitled him to a uniform, a rank, a badge or an armband which gave a new dimension to his life. Little men suddenly found themselves with status, authority and the power to strike terror into the hearts of others. If they were failures in their chosen craft or profession, they could find a subsidiary career in one of the many branches of the Nazi hierarchy. All the poisons in Germany rose to the surface and civilising constraints fell away.

Block wardens were put in charge of groups of houses and spied on their neighbours. With sufficient zeal they could be promoted to lord it over boroughs and whole towns.

Letters were known to be liable to censorship. The telephone had to be used with circumspection. Parents guarded their talk in front of their children. The cautious glance over the shoulder at the start of a conversation became a feature of German life. To all this the bulk of the population readily submitted. It hardly diminished the atmosphere of joyful expectation which pervaded Germany in those years.

### **The family**

In Nuremberg, I had many relatives whom I called uncles, aunts or cousins. The precise gradation of the relationships I left to the family genealogists. Their lives and deaths mirror the history not only of German Jewry, but of the terrible first half of the twentieth century.

Aunt Gertrude was my mother's younger sister. One summer she joined us on holiday on the Swiss side of Lake Constance. With her slight figure and green, oval, faintly mocking eyes, she attracted the teasing attention of young men at neighbouring tables on the hotel terrace, but none could match her for wit and speed of repartee.

I have a full face photograph taken of her in Nuremberg not many years later, in the spring of 1939. By then, the Nazis had reduced the Jews to outlaws. War was impending. Her eyes, all light extinguished, look into some infinite distance. Her only child, a girl of eleven, had found a home with a family in England, travelling with her little suitcase. Aunt Gertrude and her husband stayed behind in Nuremberg, trapped, with nowhere to go. I suppose the photograph was a farewell to her daughter.

My parents, my sister and I left Germany before the outbreak of war, but when it was over we could piece together their fate. For three years they lived on, compelled to wear the yellow star as an immediate means of identification, careful to keep away from their own windows, gradually and by law being deprived of heating, clothing and food. Occasionally, under cover of darkness, they were visited by my father's faithful former secretary, an Aryan German, at great risk to herself. Then came the transportation to the death camp.

Their daughter, now a grandmother, lives in Australia.

Uncle Karl and Uncle Alfred were brothers who had spent their youth in idleness and the pursuit of pleasure. When their fortune melted away under the impact of inflation and slump, they were ill equipped to meet the situation. Yet years later, when the greatest test came, the latent vitality asserted itself.

Uncle Karl who had left Nazi Germany for Sweden was by a quirk of fate in Russia when it was invaded by the German armies in 1941. In Russian eyes, he was simply a German citizen. They arrested him and put him in a Siberian labour camp where he spent seven years. In 1948,

he was released and returned to Stockholm. By then well over sixty, he occasionally visited us in London on his way to Paris, where a girl-friend awaited him.

His brother Alfred fled to Haiti, the French-speaking island in the Caribbean. He hired some sewing machines and native girls and began to make sandals which he sold to American tourists. When he fell gravely ill, one of the girls nursed him back to health. They married, the business prospered and the sandals were exported in large quantities. After the war, he took his young wife on a journey through Europe. She was a wonderful dressmaker and made all her own clothes. Her skill was matched by her ample, small-waisted figure and the bright materials set off her black skin. My father, after his initial bafflement, summoned up his long-forgotten French to contribute to the conversation.

Cousin Rudolf, two years older than me, was my earliest friend, a master builder of sand castles with curved tunnels through which we used to drag our little tin trains.

Uncle Otto, his father, was a versatile man. Engineer, humanist and head of a large industrial undertaking, he believed in work and knowledge and imposed an austere life style on his young family.

When I called, he would test my knowledge:

*Into which ocean flows the river Rhine?*

*The North Sea.*

*And the Elbe?*

*The Baltic.*

*Wrong: also the North sea. And the River Oder?*

*The North Sea.*

*Wrong: the Baltic. When is your next geography examination?*

*In a fortnight.*

*Tell your father to make you revise properly.*

*Yes, Uncle Otto.*

Sundays he often took us on long excursions. The long black car sped past pine forests, bleak fields and simple inns bearing beer signs until the landscape mellowed and we looked down upon the lovely smiling valley of the river Main, winding its way westward among vineyards, villages and baroque bishops' palaces. Surely there was not a spot on earth where man and nature had made a more perfect marriage.

The car halted and we alighted, ready for a brisk day's walk. Uncle Otto and the chauffeur who was punctiliously paid for the extra day's work, spread a map over the bonnet. Watches were synchronised and a precise reference point was determined at which the walking party was to meet up with chauffeur and car in late afternoon. Occasionally these arrangements went awry and Uncle Otto would stand in the fork of a country lane, peering for his chauffeur. Behind him, I danced about in shameless glee.

Many years were to pass during which he was to build up his firm, be deprived by the Nazis of his work and livelihood, have his teeth kicked out in Dachau concentration camp and finally carve out a successful career in England.

When I visited him in his old age he would sometimes turn in his big leather chair and pluck a book from the shelves behind him to verify a fact. If, by some rare chance, the encyclopaedia

was at variance with his memory, a second reference book would be consulted to resolve the issue. Still, there was a twinkle in his eye.

Uncle Fritz Josephthal was my father's law partner. In the First World War he has served as an infantry lieutenant. He was always calm and had a huge library of history books. In reply to my question, he confirmed that he had read them all.

In 1923, Fritz's father died. He had been a highly distinguished lawyer and respectful obituaries appeared in the press. Nazism was then in its noisy and violent infancy. Julius Streicher who after the Second World War was tried as a war criminal and most justly condemned and hanged, was then a Nuremberg schoolmaster as well as publisher of the pornographic and virulently anti-Semitic paper *Der Stürmer*. He chose this occasion to publish an obituary full of calumnies. He was known always to carry a whip.

Uncle Fritz bought a whip and confronted Streicher outside of the school:

*Did you ever meet Dr. Josephthal?*

*No.*

*Then you can now make the acquaintance of his son.*

With this, he brought out the whip and drew it several times across Streicher's face. The incident became known throughout the town.

By 1929, the Nazis had grown into a powerful party but had not yet gained control of the government. My father, as one of the secular leaders of the Jewish community, initiated a prosecution against Streicher for incitement to class hatred. Streicher was found guilty and sentenced to several months imprisonment.

In 1933 Hitler became head of the German government and Streicher Franconia's powerful *Gauleiter*. Yet, villain though he was, untrammelled by any law and with a large number of brown-shirted ruffians at his command, Streicher did not use his almost limitless local power in any act of revenge against either Uncle Fritz or my father. For nearly six more years they lived and worked in Nuremberg without a hair on their heads being harmed. They merely bore, with their fellow Jews, loss of rights and economic strangulation. When they were eventually arrested, it was on the orders of Propaganda Minister Goebbels, not Streicher's.

In later years I heard my father and uncle Fritz Josephthal discuss Streicher's remarkable restraint. They felt that there was, perhaps, in his black soul some corner of respect for men who stood their ground.

Uncle Fritz died in New York.

Cousin George was nine years my senior. I asked him how far he could jump. *Not far at all*. True enough, he could hardly propel his big, heavy body half-way across our sandpit. Furthermore, he showed not the least embarrassment at his poor performance.

George could communicate with almost every human being. With his beautiful speaking voice and great optimism, he raised the spirit of any company. He studied law and obtained his doctorate but saw his life's work in quite a different field.

Sometimes when he came to visit us, I saw him walk up and down the garden in earnest discussion with my father. My father, for a long time, chose to regard the Nazis as a passing phenomenon which in the end would be rejected by the German people. He felt too deeply rooted in the country and this commitment clouded his judgement.

George took the opposite view. Already when he was in his teens, he saw a Jewish future only in the ancient homeland, the strip of desert that twenty years later became the State of Israel. *We have no home anywhere else ... we choose a life of battle*. He objected to the Christmas

tree which, at the time, stood in so many middle class Jewish homes and in which I, as a child, took such delight.

He organised the escape of young men and women from Nazi Germany to Palestine and was arrested by the Gestapo but withstood their questioning. Later, he was caught in France on an underground mission with a hundred passports. He survived these hazards, settled on a kibbutz and decided to become a baker.

However, he caught the eye of Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister and was charged with the task of absorbing the Jews of the Diaspora into the new state, including the broken survivors of Hitler's holocaust. He became Minister of Labour in the cabinet but died of a heart attack and was buried on his kibbutz in the hills of Galilee. He had travelled a long way.

Among my friends was Ernie - little Ernie we used to call him, although he was not all that small - who always saw the funny side of everything and kept us in stitches with his dog imitations. Twitching his nose and ears he would bark and growl, snap and snarl. The high light of his repertoire was a fight between an Alsatian and a bad-tempered Pekinese. He died in Auschwitz at twenty-one.



**Ludwig Berlin with his grandson Adam on his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2011**  
(photo: private)

[Index](#)

[Home](#)