



The destruction of the synagogue and the Jewish community in Forchheim, Upper Franconia (Bavaria, Germany)

An eyewitness account of the rage during *Reichspogromnacht*¹, November 9/10, 1938

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edited by Gerhard Jochem



Dynamited Forchheim synagogue, November 10, 1938. On the second floor the wreckage of the apartment of the Bauer family is visible.

(Photo: Julius Brunner)

Germany after January 1933

As the ill winds of war and despair blew over Europe, desperation settled over the oppressed, to an extent unknown in Germany in the 20th century. There was no hope.

Yes, there were conflicts and persecutions in other parts of the world, but those were in other countries and not within the borders of Germany.

After 1933, the German regime was dedicated to the elimination of parts of German society they considered impure. It set out to create that pure *Aryan race* which was to procreate and eventually dominate the world.

¹ The night of the Nazi government sponsored pogrom is also known as *Reichskristallnacht* (*Crystal Night*) in Germany prior to World War 2. - Pogrom (puh-grum, puh-grom, poh-gruhm): A massacre or persecution instigated by the government or by the ruling class against a minority group, particularly Jews. Pogroms were common in Russia during the 19th century.

After 1933, its irreversible hard-line attacks on Jews and others did not even receive token resistance. Yes, clandestine and untoward *acts* happened, yes, harmful threats and seemingly unwarranted internments took place, but all this was more or less ignored. Yes, people outside Germany knew about some of the atrocities, but then *a sovereign nation must know best?*

There were newspapers and magazines, but they were severely and thoroughly censored and no untoward information could be published. Telephones, frequently shared party lines, were relatively scarce and one had to be aware of being listened in. Yes, there was radio (with limited coverage) and no reports adverse or damaging to the regime could be broadcast. Censorship was in full swing. The Nazi government reserved the right to open and censor letters and parts of the letter might be *redacted*. There was no TV or Internet.

The world refused to wake up, even after *Reichspogromnacht*, the first salvo to eliminate all *undesirable elements*. Eyewitness accounts were not necessarily discounted, but rather simply ignored. And what could outsiders have done? There are still debates raging of what outsiders might have done ...

Let the searchlight shine on the barbaric deeds of sheer wanton hate, destruction, persecution by constant terror and intimidation of the innocent throughout Germany starting in 1933 and continuing throughout World War 2, until 1945.

Some historical perspectives



1926 oil painting of the synagogue in Forchheim
(Photo: Verlag Medien und Dialog; artist and sponsors unknown)

This essay focuses on my growing up in the town of Forchheim (ca. 10,000 inhabitants in the 1930s), including 30 - 40 Jewish burghers, a number of them prominent shop-owners.

Jews lived in the Forchheim area well before 1675. The genealogy of my Bauer family has been accurately traced through the close-by village of Ermreuth back to the 1700s.

The synagogue in Forchheim was built in 1876 to replace the one originally built in 1808.

During the Nazi era ugly and unimaginable events took place in Forchheim, the entry point to the picturesque *Fränkische Schweiz* (Franconian Switzerland). Picketers advocating the boycott of Jewish stores were increasingly marching with their signs outside Jewish-owned stores to dissuade citizens not to enter and / or buy in these stores. Slogans like *He who buys from Jews is a traitor* were carried by them. More and more *Aryan* stores displayed the dreaded sign *Juden unerwünscht* (Jews not welcome here). What hurt most was the loss of long-standing friendships between Jews and Christians. Decent citizens began to ignore some of their life-long Jewish friends, afraid that such associations might be observed by a party member and be reported with dire consequences such as ostracism or loss of job.

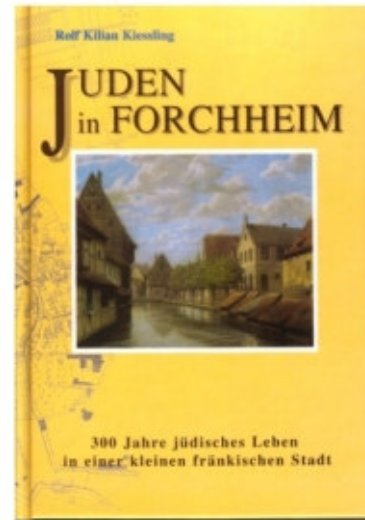
The rise of Adolf Hitler, the leader of the National Socialist German Workers Party², to power is well documented³. Nazi persecution of Jews in Germany already reared its ugly head in the 1920s, but intensified rapidly after Hitler's installation as chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. The fate of German Jews deteriorated after that date and became intolerable after the infamous Nuremberg Laws were passed in 1935.

Ugly and unimaginable events took place in Germany in general when the majority of the population embraced (or had to embrace) Nazi doctrines seriously. Particularly through their infamous Gestapo secret police the Nazis had a fierce stranglehold on the German population in general and on Jews and other minorities specifically.

Yes, it was the 20th century, but this is what happened in a civilized, modern, educated society ...

² German *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*, abbreviated NSDAP, commonly called the Nazi party.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Hitler



Map (Forchheim is indicated by the red star) and cover of Rolf Kießling's book about the Jews of Forchheim

Forchheim is situated relatively close to the city of Nuremberg, then the most stalwart Nazi bastion lead by Jew-baiting Julius Streicher who continuously fuelled the hate campaign to persecute, harass and forcing Jews to leave after 1933⁴. Streicher spread hatred by means of his publication *Der Stürmer*⁵.

In 1935 the infamous racial laws⁶ were instituted during the annual Nazi rally in Nuremberg. Persecutions climaxed during *Reichspogromnacht*, November 9/10, 1938. That outburst of intense hatred and wanton destruction was but an overture for what was to become the *final solution*, which finally extinguished all Jewish life in Germany⁷.

Developments and effects of the Nuremberg racial laws

Traditionally Nuremberg, the capital of Streicher's party district of Franconia, annually hosted the national Nazi party rally. It is significant that it was in Nuremberg where the *Laws on Citizenship and Race* were announced and enforced immediately on September 15, 1935⁸.

⁴ See: <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/GERstreicher.htm>

⁵ Literal translation *Striker*, but actually more like the *Attacker*, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_St%C3%Bcrmer

⁶ See Google under *Nuremberg*, e.g. <http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/nlaw.htm>

⁷ A timeline summarizes Nazi activities from 1933-1945: <http://remember.org/shoah/timeline.html>

⁸ For more information about *deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit* (German citizenship), the *Reichsbürgergesetz* (German citizenship law) and the Nuremberg Laws see:
http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichs-_und_Staatsangeh%C3%B6rigkeitsgesetz
http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deutsche_Staatsangeh%25C3%25B6rigkeit&ei=hXQRSuzzMYjCM6bK7VI&sa=X&oi=translate&resnum=1&ct=result&prev=/search%3Fq%3DDeutsche%2BStaatsangeh%25C3%25B6rigkeit%26hl%3Den
<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichsb%C3%BCrgergesetz>

After the Nazis' seizure of power on January 30, 1933, the persecution of Jews in Germany had become the norm and affected all parts of society. These intolerable years of Nazi domination, 1933 - 1945, gave Germany a black stain that will be difficult to obliterate forever.

Essentially, the Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of their civil rights and separated them from Gentiles legally, socially, and politically. Jews were also defined as a separate race under *The Law for the Protection of German Blood and Honor*. Being Jewish was now determined by ancestry. Thus the Nazis used race, not religious beliefs or practices, to define the Jewish people. This law forbade marriages or sexual relations between Jews and Gentiles. Hitler warned dearly that if these laws did not resolve the *problem*, he would turn to the Nazi party for a *final solution*.

More than 120 laws, decrees and ordinances were enacted after the Nuremberg Laws before the outbreak of World War 2 further eroding the rights of German Jews. Many thousands of Germans who had not previously considered themselves Jews found themselves defined as *non-Aryans*, e.g. children of *mixed marriages* - through two generations!

Essentially the laws stripped Jews of German citizenship, meaning they could be persecuted as stateless individuals. They had no longer unfettered access to protection under German law.

My personal account

My eyewitness account provides a glimpse of what happened to the German-Jewish community in Forchheim. I lived twelve years in that community, six years directly under the Nazi regime (1933 - 1939). I was an eyewitness to that infamous *Reichspogromnacht* and the ramifications thereof.

I witnessed the events while growing up in Forchheim from 1933 until we left in August 1939, barely 2 weeks prior to the outbreak of World War 2. The relentless and brutal Nazi persecution of the miniscule Jewish community (about 40 in number) of Forchheim with

<http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=de&u=http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reichsb%25C3%25BCrgergesetz&ei=JnURSPqBIOwNPKJOKYG&sa=X&oi=translate&resnum=1&ct=result&prev=/search%3Fq%3DReichsb%25C3%25BCrgergesetz:%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DG>

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/N%C3%BCrnberger_Gesetze

<http://www.rassengesetze.nuernberg.de/gesetze/index.html>

<http://www.rassengesetze.nuernberg.de/verfolgung/verfolgung4.html>

For the history of the Holocaust 1938 - 1945 (6,000,000 victims) see:

http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/history_of_the_holocaust.htm

http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holokaust#Eskalationsstufen_der_nationalsozialistischen_Judenverfolgung

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holocaust>

About the *final solution*:

http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/history_of_the_holocaust.htm

<http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/2010/12/the-jewish-holocaust>

about 10,000 inhabitants in 1938 persisted from 1933 until the last Jews were deported in the early 1940s.

The happenings described here are close and personal. Furthermore, they took place during peacetime in Germany, before the eyes of the free world.

The degree to which persecution and denigration of Jews was pursued before November 9, 1938, varied considerably, from region to region, within Germany. However, in places where the Nazis took over, matters became worse.

Events leading to and during the evening and night of November 9/10, 1938, in Forchheim are summarized in a gripping and brilliant essay written in 1988/89 by Ms. Sabine Ponater, born, raised and educated in Forchheim. During her advanced studies as a student at the *Staatliche Fachoberschule* Bamberg in the academic year 1988/89 she researched that dastardly event in Forchheim and wrote a term paper⁹ (*Schularbeit*). She obtained her information independently and primarily from public documents and resources. My recollections could not have been written without consulting her work.

My original essay¹⁰ was published in the November 23, 1999 issue in the now defunct New York based weekly German language based publication *Aufbau*¹¹.

The history and fate of the Jews of Forchheim are excellently and extensively portrayed in a book by Rolf Kilian Kießling¹². In a newspaper article Kießling also described vividly what happened to the remaining 14 Jews of Forchheim during the *final solution*, 1939 - 1942¹³.

The *final solution* was applied to all Jews living in Germany and its occupied territories, as well as parts of Italy during World War 2. Systematic extermination reached all Jews living under Nazi jurisdiction, including the few remaining in Forchheim.

There are numerous accounts of the lives of Jews in various European countries under Nazi domination, for the period 1933 - 1945. There are endless horror stories recorded by many

⁹ Sabine Ponater: *Die Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich in Forchheim unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Reichskristallnacht* (The persecution of the Jews in the 3rd Reich with particular reference to *Crystal Night* in Forchheim).

¹⁰ *A Personal Memoir. Kristallnacht in a Small German Town.*

¹¹ Translation: *Reconstruction*, or more fittingly *Rebuilding* (of mind and body). The publication was started in New York by German-Jewish refugees and has now gone out of circulation (1933 - 2003). The online archives of the original *Aufbau* are no longer available. My original article can be retrieved with several pictures from: <http://cms.herder-forchheim.de/node/105>

¹² Rolf Kilian Kießling: *Juden in Forchheim. 300 Jahre jüdisches Leben in einer kleinen fränkischen Stadt.* Verlag Kulturamt Landkreis Forchheim 2004, 240 S., ISBN 3-9806252-5-7. A German review of that book states: *Rolf Kießling unterrichtet am Herder-Gymnasium in Forchheim. Seit mehreren Jahren beschäftigt er sich mit der Geschichte der Juden in seiner Heimatstadt. Seine Forschungsergebnisse stellt er in seinem Buch „Juden in Forchheim“ vor [...]. Er gewährt Einblick in die wechselvolle Geschichte einzelner jüdischer Familien.*

¹³ http://www.sonntagsblatt-bayern.de/news/aktuell/2005_03_nue_14_01.htm

Holocaust survivors. These include anything from humiliation to murder. The extermination of countless innocent victims is well documented.

The constant harassment and ruthless persecution of Jews in Germany by the Nazi government commenced with a boycott of Jewish stores on April 1, 1933. It led to the well orchestrated *Reichspogrom*, a night of terror and unprecedented violence, and climaxed in the concentrations camps, ultimately leading to the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

Never did the Jews of Germany suspect that the persecution would reach such a feverish pitch as witnessed during that horrific *Reichspogromnacht*. Jewish homes and businesses were brutally invaded and destroyed in the middle of the night, and their synagogues destroyed. Jewish men and woman were manhandled, and even killed. The Nazis were proud of their regime of terror with no regrets of future indictments of their barbaric behavior. Their wanton destruction of life and property was after sanctioned by their laws. Those evil Jews needed to be taught a lesson and they succeeded!

These are my personal experiences and those of my immediate family during *Reichspogromnacht* and in the months that followed. Every Jewish family suffered to some degree of persecution, be it through the loss of livelihood, property, personal injury, and even death ...

In the 1930s, my family consisted of my father Anton (born in Forchheim), my mother Paula (née Sommerich, born in Ottensoos near Nuremberg) and I.



Anton and Paula Bauer, 1954

(Photo: private)



Professor and Mrs. Ludwig Bauer, 1998
(Photo: private)

In 1938 we were living in an apartment above the synagogue which had become vacant when the former occupants, the spiritual leader and cantor, *Lehrer* (teacher) Benno Reinhold and his wife Gretel (née Ebert) emigrated to the United States on April 21, 1938.

The destruction of the synagogue and the annihilation of the Jewish community of Forchheim

The day of November 9, 1938 seemed usual. I left our home early in the morning to attend the Jewish middle school in Bamberg, as usual commuting from Forchheim by train. I had been dismissed from the local *Volksschule* (public school) some time before, on the grounds that my physical safety could no longer be guaranteed.

In the absence of a radio in our home and with the morning newspaper the only source of news, we had read about the assassination attempt on diplomat Ernst Eduard vom Rath by the 17-year old Polish Jewish student Herschel Grünsplan (Grynszpan) in Paris on November 7. However, we were unaware of vom Rath's death on November 9 since this happened after the local morning paper had been printed. Even so, who would have predicted that his demise would trigger the vicious pogrom? It was a well kept party secret and there were no leaks!

A national night of destruction had been carefully orchestrated by propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels for some time - but it needed an appropriate excuse. So it was simply a matter for the party authorities to choose the night.

All of the Jewish targets in Forchheim had already been carefully cased and staked out by the Nazis as became evident as events unfolded.

As everywhere in Germany the evening of November 9, 1938 began with the annual Nazi rally in Forchheim's Paradeplatz commemorating the failed beerhall putsch of 1923 in Munich. There were the usual harangues and marches, the venomous speeches spewing poison about Jews in general, and, on that night, deploring the fatal shooting in Paris in particular. After the rally, the local Nazi leadership and its sympathizers in and out of uniform reassembled at the *Hotel National*. Probably beer was flowing freely while the Nazi assembly was waiting for their orders to avenge the death of that lowly diplomat in Paris, by inflicting *spontaneous and painful* (and I am sure meant to be memorable) retribution.

The call came around midnight from the *Gauleitung* (party district leader's office) in Bayreuth to the *Kreisleiter* (party leader on county level), physician Dr. Carl Ittameyer from Gräfenberg, a village about 14 miles from Forchheim who was to initiate and oversee the action. He, in turn, assigned posses consisting of small groups of hoodlums *to take care of the Jews*. Apparently they had thoroughly studied the maps, the addresses of all Jewish stores and homes and had coordinated a plan of attack. They knew their ways to all of their targets only too well and missed none.

Roving bands of local thugs and hangers-on fanned out to execute their designated assignments. They were empowered to dispense bush justice in the name of the law of revenge by ambushing innocent people, asleep in the middle of the night, without search warrants or lawful charges. The local police apparently had been warned. The *heroic* mob actions were to be followed by the arrest of all Jews *to protect them from the outraged populace*. It was a Nazi plot. While some of the local police collaborated, others would have been totally ineffective in preventing the wholesale destruction. They had strict orders from the Nazi leadership to keep out of it and did what they were told!

The barbarous attack was about to target Jewish homes and businesses and, above all, the synagogue, without murdering anyone. Roughing up was condoned. For each Jewish family in town it began with the infamous knock on the door in the middle of the night!

For the Bauer family it was a little different. At Wiesentstraße 15 the evening of November 9, 1938, gave no hint of the events in store. Our family had retired as usual. The stillness of the night was suddenly broken by the sound of shattering glass. Roused from a deep sleep, we realized that the large windows of the synagogue, right below our living quarters, were being smashed by a barrage of rocks! Was this a new shenanigan by the local Nazis against the Jews or what?

While different forms of harassment had been the order of the day, systematic destruction of Jewish property in this law-abiding society had not been the norm yet. Was the damage to the

synagogue a warning or would this be the beginning of a new phase? These questions were relatively quickly answered.

Loud sounds of splintering wood heralded the breaking down of the locked heavy outer door of the synagogue. Then the inside door gave way and the sanctuary was invaded by a horde of jeering and screaming hooligans. These events were quickly followed by what sounded like a demonic rampage. Earsplitting noises of unrelenting and ferocious destruction of wood, metal and glass could be heard from the sanctuary which was just beneath our apartment.

We were frightened out of our wits.

It was obvious by now that the wholesale and unfettered destruction of the main body of the synagogue had begun with sickening fury. Besides the systematic physical destruction of the interior of the synagogue, this maniacal drunken mob knew no bounds.

Unbeknownst to us, these thugs threw the holy Torah rolls into the fast flowing Wiesent river across the street. The Wiesent had certain falls in order to generate electricity. One of these dams was installed for a mill, just a few feet downstream from the synagogue. The Torah rolls were quickly swept down the river and became trapped by the machinery installed in its path. The owner of that mill, a Ms. Margareta Ladenburger, secretly retrieved the Torah rolls, hid them until liberation in 1945 and gave them to a Jewish organization.

If this gang of thugs could so blatantly violate a house of worship, where would they stop?

By now we were up and immediately faced the grim reality that we were trapped. The only escape route from the apartment was down two sets of stairs passing the entrance of the synagogue. In panic, we fled into a crawl space in the cold attic above the apartment.

Armed with a flashlight and a butcher knife in my father's hand we crouched in a corner and covered ourselves with a blanket. As we saw our lives flashing before us we could only contemplate in painful silence that this would be the end.

Not long after we heard the door to our apartment being broken open, followed by wholesale destruction of our belongings. The noise of furniture being overturned was punctuated by the breaking of glass and porcelain and the sound of unpleasant muffled human voices.

It was not long before the door to the attic was opened and our names were called. A local policeman with a flashlight, a school chum of my father, soon spotted us and we were assured that we would not suffer bodily harm. For the sake of our safety we were ordered to come down, get dressed and come with him. Of course after the sickening experiences of the night it was hard to believe him, but what choice did we have?

The local police officers formed a cordon around us separating us from the Nazis. My father was assured that my mother would be given privacy. We could hardly grasp the wholesale

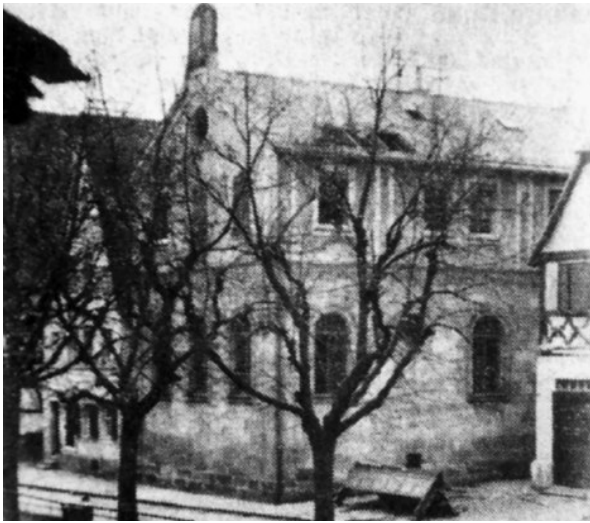
destruction of our belongings. They hustled us from the third floor into the dark cold street. As we descended the two sets of stairs, we caught a glimpse of the ravaged sanctuary - the center of our beliefs - through the wide gaping hole that was once the door. All I could think of was the destruction of the Temple, now brought home!

In the darkness we were marched to the jail and found some of the other Jewish inhabitants already there. They had also been evicted from their homes in the middle of the night, before or after their shops and dwellings had been savagely trashed and pillaged. All exchanged tales of horror. Julius Prager, who had lost a leg while serving in World War 1, had been forced to hobble from his home to jail without the aid of his artificial limb. One could go on and on. Men and women were herded into separate cells. It was almost dawn by now.

The next part of the Nazis' plan called for the synagogue to be burned down, but firemen and neighbors protested that the fire might spread to adjacent buildings. Hence it was decided to dynamite it. The local authorities allegedly refused to participate and a special demolition squad was called from Nuremberg to finish the task. Some of our belongings had been pushed into the back of the building before the dynamite blasting took place on the morning of November 10. The photographer Julius Brunner who lived across the river recorded the destruction of the synagogue for posterity in black and white photographs.

Where once the Forchheim synagogue stood there is now a parking lot.

At about 2 p.m., all the Jewish males (Leo Abraham, Anton Bauer, Hermann Bayreuther with his sons Willie and Robert, Gottlieb Braun, Ignaz Frank, Bernhard Gröschel, Sigmund Hutzler, Julius Prager, Theobald Sämman, Paul Wertheim and I, then 12 years old) were paraded like common criminals from jail through the streets of Forchheim to the synagogue. The populace had been encouraged to witness the event. The streets were crammed with a jeering throng. It was an unbelievable experience. I just wanted to die, right there and then. I was so frightened that I could not focus to see if I could identify anyone. It was so out of this world one would have to flash back to the Coliseum where humans were dragged in for sacrifice - simply impossible to describe!



Photos by Julius Brunner of the synagogue's destruction: Left after the desecration during *Pogromnacht* with a sitting bench in front¹⁴, right the remainders after the blasting

I looked up - there was the sky - our apartment and belonging gone, ruthlessly destroyed - all of it!

The shock of seeing the half-dynamited building was devastating. Any furniture, the pews, ritual objects, the *Biehma*¹⁵, the *Aron Hakodesch*¹⁶ totally demolished, the always-lit eternal light¹⁷ gone.

A two-wheeled cart was standing there. The Nazis surrounded the Jewish men and ordered them to *pick up their own excrement* until the cart was filled with the rubble and stones of the synagogue.

Our indignation at this public humiliation of law-abiding citizens defies description. We were in a state of disbelief and overcome by mixed emotions - absolute rage due to violation, coupled with relentless fear of the immediate unknown. All belief in humanity vanished!

After the destruction of a house of worship and our home, the jeering mob was the final public humiliation. For my father and I there was also the sinking feeling of looking up and seeing the few pieces of our furniture dangling from the edge of the ruined building. Words cannot describe our thoughts. Standing there in the street, exposed to yelling protagonists, we were simply drained when boiling blood turns into that icy chill of fear, the fear of death. Unforgettable ...

¹⁴ Original German caption of the photo: *Ein Bild vom 10. November 1938: Die Forchheimer Synagoge war geschändet worden (eine Sitzbank, Teil der Inneneinrichtung, liegt auf dem Gehweg). Wenige Stunden später wurde das Bauwerk gesprengt. (Foto: Julius Brunner/Archiv)*

¹⁵ Podium with lecture stands from which services were conducted.

¹⁶ Cabinet housing the Torah scrolls.

¹⁷ It was later returned by an anonymous burgher and is now housed in a museum in Forchheim.

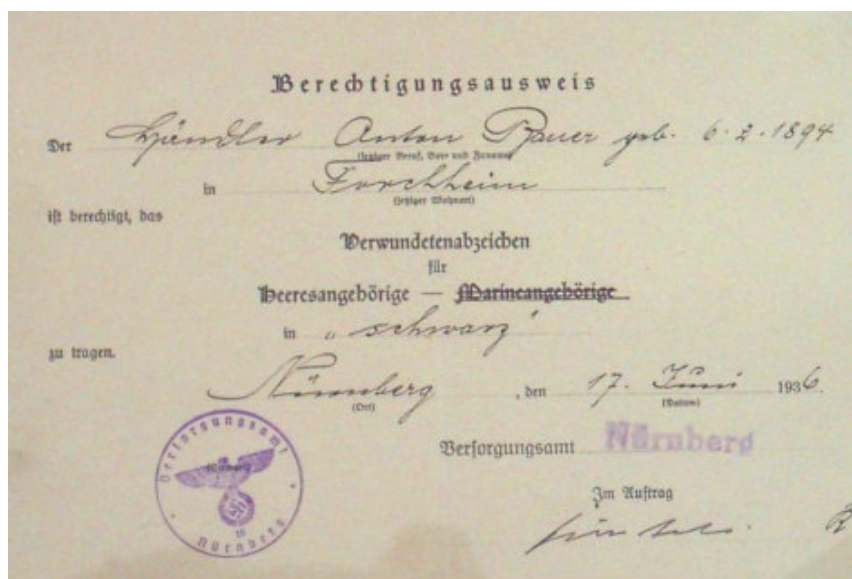
At that moment I lost my youth and became a man. These dastardly acts robbed me of my innocence and I felt new responsibilities settling on me.

Then we were marched back to the jail and locked up once more for the night. Very early the next morning and unknown to my mother and me, all of the Jewish men were unceremoniously marched to the train station and shipped off to the notorious concentration camp at Dachau. Once more this act was justified on the ground of being *for their own protection*.

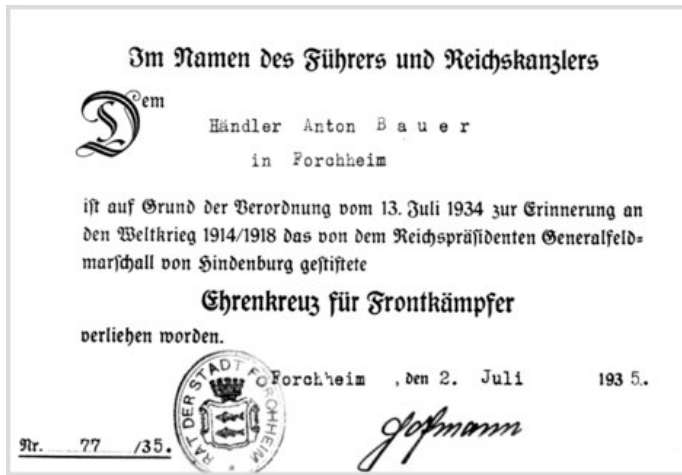
Because of my young age I was spared that denigration. The women and I were released. My mother and I were assigned a couple of rooms in a less-ravaged Jewish home, namely the Franks' house on Hauptstraße.

For weeks my mother and I were afraid to go out unless it was absolutely essential. Of course going to school was out of question. The Jewish school, which had been attached to the synagogue in Bamberg, had been burned down with that synagogue during *Kristallnacht*. We agonized over our future, the fate of my father and the uncertainty of escape.

To secure release of the interned Jewish men in Dachau including my father a number of bureaucratic procedures were available. Release from a concentration camp was possible if the respective person left Germany directly, from the camp to the border and beyond with a valid entrance visa to another country. Those inmates who still had businesses could barter their release by selling them to suitable non-Jewish buyers, thus expediting the process of *Aryanization* of businesses. Then there was an official application based on a prisoner's World War 1 record. My father had served Germany honorably, had been awarded the Iron Cross and ever since had a bullet lodged in his chest! He was eligible to apply for release. What a reward for such gallant service to the fatherland to beg for release from Dachau!



Legitimization for Anton Bauer to wear the medal for wounded soldiers (*Verwundetenabzeichen*)
(Photo: private)



Legitimization for Anton Bauer to wear the medal for combat soldiers in World War 1 (*Ehrenkreuz für Frontkämpfer*), issued in July 1935 and picture of the original medal

(Photo: private)

My father came home totally unannounced in the middle of the night of December 31, 1938, looking haggard beyond description. He would never discuss his experiences in Dachau with me, but the inhuman treatments in concentration camps are only too well documented.

Each family had to deal with the tragedy as best it could. Some escaped, some perished in concentration camps. The misery imposed on those peaceful citizens by a ruthless regime in a civilized country defies comprehension. Trauma of such magnitude can never be overcome. The memories may recede temporarily into the back of the mind, but they are never erased. My tears have not ceased to dry!

Exodus: A difficult journey to a new world

By a miracle my parents, my maternal grandparents and I received the precious entrance visas for Australia. The visas were procured through the tireless and persistent efforts of my mother's brother and his wife Justin and Edith Sommerich, who had immigrated to Sydney in 1937, when entry to Australia had minimum requirements. However, by 1939 emigration to Australia had tightened considerably. The depression produced much unemployment and immigration was restricted.

The prime requirements after 1938 to emigrate to Australia were either a large sum of money allowing people to be self-sustaining, or skills in certain preferred trades. The Australian government would periodically post the need for such workers. In 1938 there was a great need for

welders. For that reason in early 1939 my father, a businessman, trained at a certified trade school in Berlin to procure experience and a trade certificate. At the same time my uncle procured a *letter of intent to employ* from a firm in Sydney which needed welders. With that certificate and the letter of potential employment we finally procured the treasured entrance visa to Australia in May of 1939.

My parents and I, along with my maternal grandmother Babette Sommerich, née Himmelreich, made it out of Germany by the skin of our teeth, in early August 1939, approximately two weeks before the breakout of World War 2.

But our *exodus* was not without considerable hindrances.

I had just turned 13 years old when the day to leave Forchheim finally arrived. We had already sent several suitcases ahead to the ship. In addition, weeks before we had packed a *lift* (wooden crate) with furniture, clothing and household items for a separate dispatch to Australia. It turned out that the German freighter carrying the crate never made it and all this packing was for naught.

In preparation of the two months trip to Australia we needed to carry clothes for every season. They were chosen carefully for the limited suitcase space and these suitcases were finally closed the night before our departure. Needless to say that we hardly slept and arose early.

It was a cool and humid summer morning. Carrying two suitcases each together with clothes on our backs and with only 10 *Reichsmark* cash money for each person my father, my mother and I left the Franks' House near the town hall very early heading for the train station. We knew it was going to be the beginning of a very long journey of 14,000 miles (20,000 km).

It was an eerie and unceremoniously somber departure. I am sure my father suffered the sinking feeling of separation more than any one of us. After all he had lived in that town for some 45 years.

The town was quiet and still, successfully hiding its seething hatred for the Jews. It was the end of an era, the end of the Bauer family's presence in Forchheim.

We stole out of town like criminals, with broken hearts and little hope that there was a future whatsoever. Everything seemed bleak. We marched past the former Bauer house Am Marktplatz 5, where my father lived his whole life and where I was born. A last look - so sad! The pace of walking increased almost to running, yes, running from hell - into the total unknown!

There was no one to see us off, no farewells, just terrible and unforgettable memories haunting us. Some invisible force seemed to lash out at us, literally driving us to the train station - a chain broken. No looking back. Not a word was spoken. Everyone seemed immersed in deep thoughts.

The killing silence finally was broken by the noisy arrival of the slow local train. We boarded it, somewhat relieved. After an interminable time we regained some semblance of composure.

It was an indescribable mixture of emotions, still aching from the horrible experiences of years of persecution, particularly during the last twelve months, and staring frightfully into the face of a unknown future.

The train headed to Nuremberg, where we picked up my maternal grandmother. In the process we changed platforms and trains to board the *Express* to the Dutch Coast.

The express train moved swiftly with relatively few stops. One of the scheduled stops however was Gelsenkirchen where we had hoped to have a few minutes for a very brief farewell with one of my aunts on my father's sisters, Hedwig Goldschmidt, and her husband on the platform. Somehow we missed each other - they might have waited on a different platform - and could not say goodbye. We never saw them again: They perished in Riga in 1942.

The train was supposed to take us to the Dutch port of Hoek van Holland where we were slated to board a ferry to take us overnight to Norwich, England. From there we were to take a train to Liverpool in order to catch the steamer to Australia. Originally we were supposed to detour to London for a day and one night before proceeding to Liverpool. But this again was not to be.

The procedure at the German-Dutch border had been well circulated by word of mouth to those Jews fleeing by this route. It was fraught with more chicanery! No, they did not wish to make it easy to leave, they had to put their dagger in once more: All passengers had to disembark from the train for customs control. Jewish passengers were singled out. They began an extensive luggage search for any *contraband* since it was forbidden to take out jewelry, items made of silver and gold and general items of value (e.g. cameras). Persons were permitted to retain their wedding rings but by law no money could be taken out above the prescribed limit of a mere 10 *Reichsmark*!

In the meantime non-Jewish passengers were allowed to re-board the train to continue their journey, while the Jewish passengers were *slightly inconvenienced* by missing that train and were forced to wait in that dreary waiting room for the next train for the Dutch Coast hours later. However we were fully prepared for this standard chicanery and had allotted extra time to complete that part of the trip. But we were not prepared for the next blow.

Finally the next train arrived well after midnight. We reached the border early next morning where the Dutch stopped the train and began an intensive inspection of all passengers. No, we did not have to disembark, but nevertheless we were prisoners in the train.

The Dutch immigration authorities found a *flaw* in our transit visas. They would not permit us to proceed on this train through their beloved country of Holland (all of 2 hours) in spite of the fact that we had valid train tickets, tickets for crossing by ferry from Holland to England,

transit visas to travel across England, tickets to board the ship at Liverpool, and proper emigration visas for Australia. No, according to them we did not have that lousy transit visas to pass through Holland by train en route to Liverpool.

Perhaps my love for the Dutch tends to be tempered by this experience. On paper their bureaucratic request was not unreasonable, but psychologically it was devastating! The idea of returning to the *Vaterland* in person with this entire luggage was enough to turn anyone's stomach. There was the possibility of further detention and chicanery at the border and the idea that we might miss the last chance to catch that midnight ferry to England and thus miss the passage to Australia! But what choices did we have? Faith! So back we went to the fatherland.

We paid for roundtrip tickets from the border to Cologne. From the train station in Cologne we took a cab to the Dutch consulate. Within minutes that official bureaucratic stamp, the transit visa, was firmly imprinted on our passports. Then back by cab to the Cologne train station to wait anxiously for the express train to Hoek van Holland.

Now comes the drama: We pleaded passionately with the German authorities at that infamous German-Dutch border station to permit us to continue our journey on that train, since we had already been scrutinized and processed by proper exit procedures 24 hours ago. We desperately wanted to avoid waiting for the later train since there was a good chance we would miss the departure of the ship in Liverpool. Fortunately someone had enough compassion to let us continue into Holland.

We made the ferry from Holland to England and then immediately took a train from Norwich to Liverpool. We boarded the ship to Australia with barely two hours to spare. As a matter of fact the steamer had already separated from the quay when my grandmother's wicker trunk, a part of her on-board luggage, was hoisted from the wharf and swung onto deck!

This began our almost two months journey: Liverpool, England, to Sydney, Australia - most of it on high seas after World War 2 had broken out - remember the U-boats! The trip was via Cape Town, South Africa. We arrived in Sydney in early October 1939.

Seeking to start life anew was rough beyond belief for my parents. There were the severe language barrier and the lack of jobs since it was the time of the economic depression. Fortunately I could find diversions in my studies at the school I had been assigned to. My parents found a job in the country, some 600 miles from Sydney, working as domestics on a large sheep ranch. I remained in Sydney with my uncle's family to have access to better schooling. Eventually I studied at the University of Sydney on a full scholarship for my Bachelor and Master of Science degrees, then in the USA at Northwestern University and Harvard and Columbia Universities for advanced degrees. That training prepared me for a teaching and re-

search career in organic-medicinal chemistry. I was a member of the Faculty of the College of Pharmacy, Department of Medicinal Chemistry, University of Illinois at Chicago for 42 years. In retrospect life with its many trials and tribulations, successes and disappointments helped to put the dastardly episodes of the 1930s into the background.

Postscript

The municipality of Forchheim unveiled a sandstone memorial designed by Hermann Leitherer and hewn from Franconian sandstone on November 14, 1982. The inscription on one side says:

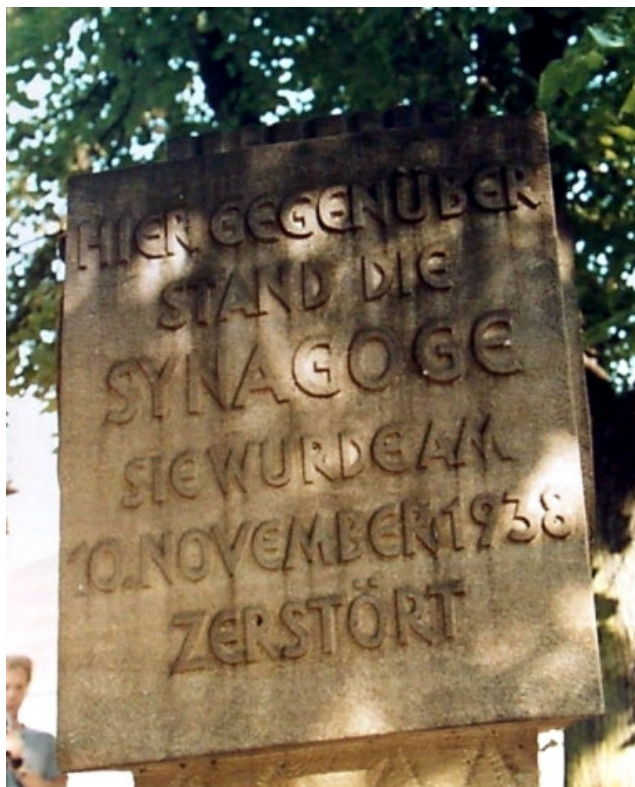
Hier gegenüber stand die Synagoge. Sie wurde am 10. November 1938 zerstört.

Here, across the street, stood the synagogue. It was destroyed on November 10, 1938

The other side offers this apology:

In Ehrfurcht und Dankbarkeit gedenkt die Stadt der Leistung und Leiden der jüdischen Mitbürger. In deference and gratitude, the town remembers the achievements and sufferings of its Jewish fellow citizens.

However well intentioned no words of apology can erase the memory of the physical and spiritual denigration inflicted upon innocent human beings in their own town. The criminal acts of Nazi Germany against its Jewish citizens will remain an indelible stain in the annals of German history.



Pictures of the memorial to the Jews in Forchheim by Ludwig Bauer, 1987

My wife and I had absolutely no plans whatsoever to ever revisit Germany in our lifetimes. It was too abhorrent to contemplate. It was at the insistence of our two sons to guide us through the physical places of suffering that we reluctantly agreed in 1987 to acquaint them personally with these evil places. The initial trip back to our birthplaces evoked emotions too difficult to deal with. After that trip we became aware of documentations and data relating to events that took place during the Nazi era.

The witnesses of my generation of young Jews from Forchheim were besides myself:

- Irmgard (Irma) Mathes, née Gröschel who died in New Jersey on November 17, 2011,
- Josef and Lothar Stern who left in 1935 by a *Kindertransport* to the USA,
- their twin brothers Herbert and Manfred Stern, now deceased, who had emigrated before *Kristallnacht* in 1938,
- Martin Wertheim who died in Milwaukee in January 2010,
- Robert Bayreuther who deceased in New York City,
- his older brother Willie Bayreuther who escaped after *Kristallnacht* and died a few years ago in Montreal, Canada and
- Josef Stern who has died recently in Costa Rica.

The *final solution* in Forchheim

The gruesome discovery of some 14 black and white photographs in a Forchheim photo shop was reported in the local newspaper on November 9, 2008¹⁸, exactly 70 years after *Reichspogromnacht*. Now a record exists of one of the deportations of the remaining local Jews. They were picked up on November 27, 1941, for transportation to their final destination. These pictures were apparently taken by an employee of that photo shop in full daylight and in full sight of the overseeing authorities! They defy human experiences.

¹⁸ The German text of the article reads: *Forchheim - Es war wohl einer der schwärzesten Tage in der langen Geschichte Forchheims. 27. November 1941, 10 Uhr vormittags: An der Westseite des Paradeplatzes, direkt vor dem damaligen Fotogeschäft Luthardt, steht ein abgeplanter Lkw. Die Behörden haben die „Evakuierung“ eines Großteils der Forchheimer Juden angeordnet. Insgesamt acht, zumeist ältere Juden - sechs Frauen und zwei Männer - verladen unter den Blicken zahlreicher „Schaulustiger“ ein paar wenige Koffer, in denen sich die letzten Habseligkeiten befinden, die man ihnen noch gelassen hat. Auf ihren Wintermänteln sind gelbe Davidsterne aufgenäht. Zwei Bamberger Kriminalbeamte in Zivil, ein uniformierter Forchheimer Polizist sowie ein strammer SS-Mann mit Aktentasche überwachen die „Evakuierung“. Es ist gespenstisch still.*



Two of the photos found in 2008, to the right the deportee Gottlieb Braun
(Photos provided by the author)



Two other deportees from Forchheim: Jenny and Leo Abraham
(Photos provided by the author)

The *Mahnmal* for the deportations in Forchheim

On Sunday, November 16, 2008, a plaque was unveiled to commemorate the deportations of the remaining Jews from Forchheim who were subsequently murdered in various camps.



The plaque commemorating Forchheim's victims of the Shoah
(Photos provided by the author)

The plaque reveals the truth:

Entrechtet - Deportiert - Ermordet

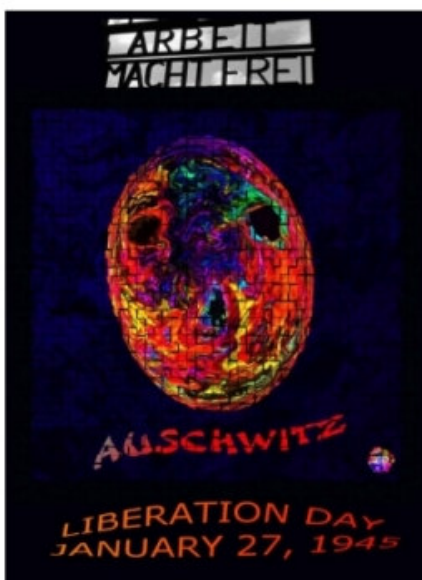
Disenfranchised - Deported - Murdered

In memoriam to those who suffered and have died.

April 2012

Ludwig Bauer Ph.D.

Professor Emeritus, formerly Professor of Medicinal Chemistry, College of Pharmacy, University of Illinois at Chicago 1955 - 1997



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