

Recollections from one who was
there

Place - Berlin

Time - 1933

My father owned a menswear shop. One day he arrived to find the S.R (black uniforms, as opposed to the S.S who wore brown) standing outside the shop stopping customers and saying "Don't go in there, they're Jews." My father came to the conclusion the only thing to do was to lock up the shop and go home. "That's the end of my business," he said. He was terribly upset and ended up in bed, sick, never to return to his business.

Place: Berlin

Time: The Crystal Night, 1938.

"I looked out of my window and everything seemed to be burning. The Nazis were burning down all the synagogues and

② smashing windows of Jewish businesses and homes. It was terrible."

1938, Berlin

"A man dressed in civilian clothes entered the office where I was secretary. He approached the boss's wife, Mrs. Leyser, and presented her with a card. She became very upset: He was from the Gestapo and wanted Mr. Leyser (who, by the way, was a very fine man of great integrity). While Mr. Leyser was being fetched Mrs. Leyser said to me, "Go quickly and buy some food for him to hide in his pockets so he won't be hungry". She was so upset. I ran quickly to nearby shops to get him a few items of food - which he took as the man took him away. The only other Jewish employee, Nera Hirschberg, and I took his very upset wife home

③ in a taxi and tried to comfort her. As Mrs. Leyser had no children Vera and I tried to alleviate her distress ~~for the~~ during this trying time. No sound of Mr. Leyser, no message, no sign, came — day after day we waited — unsuccessfully — One day, over 6 weeks later, the office door opened and a dirty old tramp walked in. It was only when he spoke that we recognized Mr. Leyser's voice! He was pitifully thin, dirty (he had not bathed or shaved in the 6 weeks away) and he was suffering from pneumonia. The Nazis had released him only on the promise that he sell his business, immediately, to Aryans. All the staff were kept on — except me, Vera and the Leyser's who were told "Jews can't stay on..." "anyone out. They are persecuted."

④ June: Crystal Night

"They (the Gestapo) came to our business with sticks, banging and calling "Juden (Jews), Juden, we want to kill you! Open the doors." (In German). They knocked with iron bars but couldn't get in.

I sat in the corner shaking with fright until they went (after some neighbours ^(non-Jews) came and shouted to them to leave us alone."

"I got my permit to come to New Zealand. Everyone said how lucky I was — it was better than winning first prize in a lottery! My former employers, the Leysers, begged me to try and help them to come to N.Z. too, once I arrived. I said I'd do my best but, naturally, would have to try and get my ^{step}mother, father and ^{half}sister first. I arrived in New Zealand in July, 1939, just 8 weeks before the outbreak of the war. It was too late to bring anyone out. They all perished."

⑤ "My half-sister, Gerda, was a dress-designer at Heumann's. All the Jewish people were dismissed from their jobs. For some reason Gerda was called back as they desperately needed a designer. She (in my opinion, stupidly,) complied with their request and returned, happy to be earning again. The other employees were not allowed to work with her and she had her own separate office."

"Many girls, at the time, got permits to enter other countries as housemaids. They were happy to work as maids, even though this was not their usual work, in order to escape."

"When I arrived in N.Y. all my going away and wedding presents, (porcelain etc.) were broken. I am

6) certain the German authorities,
when inspecting them before
putting them on the ship to N.Z.,
purposely packed them in
such a way that they would
break ... but how could I
prove it? I cried because
everything was broken but
my friends said, "Don't be
silly — as long as you've
escaped ----"

Narrated by:

Dorothy Eisig

(nee Dorothea Schendel)

written by daughter Merle