

## Time 'Too Painful' to Remember

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The Golden Age Club in the basement of an upper Manhattan synagogue was abuzz with gossip, laughter and the shuffle of cards when the rabbi, himself 79 years old, struck a spoon against a metal ash tray to get everyone's attention.

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"Does anyone want to talk about Kristallnacht?" asked the rabbi, Ralph Neuhaus. Nothing moved. "Please," he said in German. "Surely, we all have memories."

More silence, until one woman, regal in bearing and wearing a purple dress, slowly made her way to the front of the room.

"It is very painful for us," the woman, Fannie Joelson, explained with a strong German accent. "We saw too much, we hurt too much. We do not want to remember." And then she paused, took in a breath and continued: "But we do remember. How can we forget?" *Lives Shaped by a Night*

It was the 50th anniversary of Kristallnacht. Thousands of people flocked to commemorative services in synagogues, churches and public squares across the United States.

But there were some - like the 100 elderly people gathered to play cards Tuesday at Congregation Ohav Sholaum at Broadway and 196th Street - who needed no services, no candlelight parades. These are the survivors, the living memorials; men and women whose lives were shaped by Kristallnacht and the events that followed; men and women who will never forget, because they cannot.

Tears ran down Mrs. Joelson's face. "I remember it - and feel it - like it was yesterday. My father taken by the storm troopers. My husband." She had trouble finishing her sentences and lapsed frequently into German. "Never heard from them again. Never."

"In my town, Grossen Buseck, they did not burn the synagogue because it was too close to the houses owned by Germans. The Nazis were ordered not to destroy German property. But they took out the Torahs and tefillin from the synagogue and made a fire of them in the street." *Ordered to Clean Debris*

"They took us to the school to show us. And I said to my friend, 'When they shoot us, don't cry. Don't cry. Stand proud.' "

But she and her friend were not shot. They and the other women were ordered to go home and clean up the shattered glass, the smashed doors, the broken furniture.

Three years later, despite desperate attempts to emigrate, she was still in Germany and taken to the concentration camp at Theresienstadt. She survived there until she was liberated by the Allies in 1945.

"That is the outline," Mrs. Joelson said. "That is enough."

As she spoke, others cautiously approached and added details, as if they were partners in a collective nightmare.

Norbert Lowenstein, an 80-year-old from the town of Giessen, said: "I lost 35 members of my family. Thirty-five. I am the only one left." He never married. "Never found the right girl," he said with a sad smile. Ordered to Destroy Synagogue Gerda Sternberg, 67, said that in her town, Bosen, near the French border, the Nazis did not destroy the synagogue. "They gave us the axes and ordered us to do it," she said. "My father was a very Orthodox man. They made him destroy the holy ark." Her father, her mother and her sister died in concentration camps. "I never found out where or when," she said. She marks the anniversaries of their deaths - on their birthdays. "They are the only days I have."

Fritz Falkenstein, 76, remembered the Nazis coming to his house in Hochneukirch, near Cologne, and asking for his father, who owned a local cigar factory. "I told them, 'My father is sick. Take me instead.' They did, but who knew what they would be like? In the Rheinland we did not know what animals they were."

Mr. Falkenstein was sent to Dachau, but was sent home a few months later to sign over his father's factory to the Nazis. "Our factory was being 'Aryanized,' " he said. "We had employed 150 to 160 people. When we finally got out and came to America, we were lucky to get jobs in a factory. And the women washed floors." *Lined Up Before Machine Guns*

Morris Hubert, an 82-year-old retired butcher, was also arrested on Kristallnacht as he drove a car near his home in Frankfurt. "The Nazis lined up 50 of us before the machine guns," he said. "The commandant was called away to take a phone call. We waited. When he returned he sent us away. I still do not know why."

Later, Mr. Hubert was sent to Buchenwald. "In the camp there was a cage with a bear and an eagle," he said. "Every day, they would throw a Jew in there. The bear would tear him apart and the eagle would pick at his bones." "But that's unbelievable," whispered a visitor. "It is unbelievable," said Mr. Hubert, "but it happened."

"Everybody has a story," said a woman who would not tell hers and appeared tired of hearing the others speak. She wanted to put an end to the talk of Kristallnacht, so she turned to a diminutive woman who was talking about the death of her son and said without malice, "Paula, we're waiting for you."

The small woman rose and returned to her place at a card table.

Soon the room was back to normal. Gossip, laughter and the shuffle of cards filled the air.

photo of Rabbi Ralph Neuhaus and Fannie Joelson (NYT/Eddie Hausner)

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