

Kristallnacht Speech by Margot Hammerschlag b.Marx
9th of November 2009¹

I am Margot Hammerschlag. I was born in 1921 in the town of Biebrich located in the central region west of Frankfurt, Germany. I was 17 years old on November 9, 1938, the night of broken glass -- Kristallnacht --which we have come here to commemorate.

One of five children, I was the only one still living at home with my parents when Kristallnacht took place. Because of the Hitler's rise to power and the growing threat to Jews, my oldest brother went to South Africa, my two sisters² went to Switzerland, and my youngest brother went to Israel -- or what was then called Palestine.

Things were terrible for the Jews in Germany before Kristallnacht, beginning in 1933 when Hitler came to power, Jews were required to identify themselves to the authorities so if you were Jewish, it was not a secret. You could walk in the streets and people would yell things at you like "dirty Jew".

In Biebrich, we lived a few buildings down from a Jewish butcher shop. At about nine o'clock in the evening I heard a huge crash of glass. We knew that the windows of the butcher shop were smashed and everything inside the store was being destroyed. We were afraid for the owner of the store and his family who lived in the same building, but neither he nor we could do anything about it.

¹ Transmitted by her daughter Elaine Arbizo

² Frieda 1914-1989, Flora 1916-1961

My parents and I stayed put in the house, frozen. The SA and the SS were in the streets laughing and making noise as they destroyed everything. I can still hear the crashing of glass. We didn't dare go out of the house.

Early the next morning I had to go to work. I worked a part-time job at a fabric store owned by a Jewish family. As I walked along the street toward the shop, there were Nazis in the street laughing and carrying on. I was petrified that they would kill me, but they just laughed at me and said "Oh here comes another Jew." They let me walk by.

I went to the store because I was concerned about the owners. When I got to the store I could not believe my eyes. All of the windows were smashed, the shelves were emptied and fabric and supplies were scattered all over the floor and out onto the street. The family that owned the store also lived upstairs, fortunately they were left unharmed.

Further down the street was our synagogue. They had burned our synagogue. It was not burned down to the ground but it was all black, a total mess. I could not go inside, and there was nobody from town around to talk to about it. I just walked down to look at it and it was all black.

My mother's sister was married to a Swiss citizen and his family had gotten my two sisters to Switzerland.³ But by November of 1938 when Kristallnacht happened it was too late for me to join them. The Swiss government was not allowing any more Jews in to the country⁴. My parents were trying and trying to find a way to get me out of Germany.

³ Family Rottner-Ackermann, no children, lived in Basel Lindenhofstrasse 14

⁴ From August 1938

Finally, we made arrangements for me to leave through an organization in England which hired foreign domestic workers. A family in England got a permit to bring me out of Germany. In July of 1939, just two months before the war began, I was able to leave.

I left Germany all on my own, without my parents, without knowing anybody. My father believed that Hitler would not bother him or my mother because he was a veteran of the German army -- he fought in World War I. He believed that he and my mother would be safe because of that, but he still wanted to get me out of the country just to make sure. I remember saying goodbye to my parents at the railroad station and seeing them standing there as I rode away. That was the last time I ever saw them.

The trip to England required me to travel by train through Germany and France and then by boat across the English Channel. The Jews had to carry a special passport that identified us as Jews. On the train, they asked me for my passport and I heard the French train officials laughing at me -- "oh there goes another Jew." They took my passport away and I was shivering, afraid. I thought, "what if they don't give me back my passport? How will I get into England? I need my visa and my passport to get into England!" I was all alone with nobody to help. I thought I was lost.

I did make it to England and the woman whose house I worked in was actually very kind to me. I spoke only a few words of English, and I remember that the lady of the house hired another domestic worker from Austria with whom I could speak German. I remained in England through the war.

England of course joined the war against Germany so there was no communication between the two countries. For a

while, we had news of my parents through our relatives in Switzerland. Then one day the news stopped. We never heard from them again.

It wasn't until 2005, that we learned the fate of my parents. On June 10, 1942, along with 380 other Jews, my parents were deported from Wiesbaden to the concentration camp in Poland called Majdanek. We do not know whether they survived the trip, my mother was very sick -- a diabetic. That was the last news we had of my parents.

After the war, my brother⁵ left Palestine and came to America; and when I was able, I followed. Many other German Jews settled in Hartford and the Congregation Tikvoh Chadoshoh was formed. In English, it the name means "new hope". The events of November 9, 1938 remain in my memory, and it is my hope that Kristallnacht will always be remembered.

⁵ Manfred Marx, married to Ursula Ackermann