

L'chaim—To Life After the Kristallnacht in Berlin
November 9, 1938
Part Two
By Norbert Lachman

It was November 8, 1938, inside the Jewish hostel, the Ahawah House, in Berlin, Germany. The time was 7 a.m. Breakfast was being served. There were mostly young men, and few elderly ones. The girls who lived upstairs usually ate all their meals separately, except on the Sabbath. One of the men mentioned this morning, he heard on the radio that somebody was killed in Paris, France and sounded as if a Jewish boy had killed a German man, who worked at the German Embassy. There was no further information given. We discussed it at the breakfast table, and concluded that this story was nothing else but propaganda from the Nazi Ministry of that misfit Josef Goebels, one of the biggest and outspoken Jew haters of the Third Reich, who blamed the Jews for all the world misery.

Later during the day, the facts revealed that a Jewish boy, Hershel Greenspan, did kill an unknown Nazi party member in Paris, and that man was Ernst von Rath, an office worker for the German embassy. Now the Nazis in Germany had a good excuse to vilify all Jews without mercy. In my mind, I still see the headlines in the Nazi newspaper: "Out of Greenspan, we will make millions."

It was 11 p.m. when the lights went out at the Ahawah house. My room, with a roommate, was situated close by the main gate. It was well past midnight when we suddenly heard the outside bell ringing. Some of us rushed outside in the bitter cold, dressed mostly in pajamas. In front of the gate, we could see men massed in their black SS uniform, wearing the dreadful "Death Head" insignia division. There were policemen with their rubber batons and a bunch of civilians. Later we found out that those civilians were from the secret service or "Gestapo." The Gestapo was the most feared division in all of Germany. We also noticed army trucks parked at the curb. I thought that I was dreaming but this nightmare was all too real.

Once the front gate opened, the Nazis marched in military fashion with their heavy boots toward the entrance hall. We, who opened the doors, frozen from the cold, ran back to our rooms to warm up. Once the Nazi horde was inside, a screaming voice said, "Everybody out. Make it fast—Raus Raus (Hurry Up)!" Bewildered from the commotion, the boys and men came running to the entrance hall, not knowing what was in store for them. They all looked in disbelief and very frightened at the Nazi horde. One by one the girls came out of their rooms upstairs and stopped short on the stairs.

"Line up" the Nazis screamed at us. To them we all were some sort of animals. "Everyone will be questioned. Have all your papers ready. Let us know if you don't have papers! We are warning you, if any of you Jews try to get away, you will be shot." One of the Gestapo men took out a large sheet with names of people who supposedly lived in this house. "Your name" screamed the Gestapo man. Some of the questions of the Gestapo went like this: "Do you have a passport?" "No, I don't," said the first man, "but I do have papers." After a small conference with his henchmen, the Gestapo said never mind, and go to my right side and stay there. The next man in line asked the same question, but more to the point. "Why are you in Berlin? Are you a spy for a foreign country? Who pays you?" These kinds of questions went on and on. Now came my turn. My heart was pounding as never before. I showed them my Danzig passport, with papers that I am attending the "Ort" school here, in Berlin. The Gestapo man, who questioned me, became more civilized in his tone, and I was told to stay on his left side. At this time, I was the only one standing on the left side. Finally after the interrogation, one other boy was also told to go to the left side. A thought came to me: "Who shall live or who should die?"

Suddenly everything was quiet, all eyes turned to the stairs where the girls were standing. Our housemother, Dr. Alexander, came down some steps. She looked around, and nothing was

said...quietly with tears in her eyes, she went back upstairs to her room. The Nazis did not stop her. Suddenly at this point, those who had to stay on the right side were forced into the waiting trucks and driven off, never to be seen again...their destination supposedly the Polish border. That night got much colder, until I saw a Torah in flames in the street.

To be continued...