

One day after I arrived in my hometown, Breslau, in April 2004, I attended Sabbath services at the synagogue in a room in a run-down building near the old synagogue, which the Nazis devastated on *Kristallnacht* in 1938. Services at the Storch Synagogue, modernized and used to attract hundreds of people and were led by a cantor and the highly regarded Rabbi Moses Hofman. The chanting of the all-male choir made attendance so appealing for those of us who normally prayed at one of the other synagogues. By contrast, about thirty people attended the service I attended in the spring of 2004; it was conducted by a cantor. The rabbis who told me that he planned to continue for a while, but he was not sure that anyone would be able to support the Wrocław Jewish community, numbering perhaps 100 families, cannot afford a rabbi and the sexton is not sufficiently educated to lead the service; thus, the congregants, all European, face a bleak future in seeking to retain their identity.

It was a traditional service conducted entirely in Yiddish, brew, and men and women were seated separately. Only one person could be considered religiously observant, a man converted from Catholicism. A highly cultivated man, in foreign languages, he had learned Hebrew and Jewish law. His reason for emigrating because in Wrocław, or anywhere else, cannot provide his children with the kind of Jewish education he considers desirable.

covered her origins only in her twenties and thirties. She studied the laws and traditions of Judaism to deliver a “dvar Torah” (a sermon, literally “word of Torah”) during the service. She spoke for about ten to fifteen minutes, although I could not follow her presentation—the subject was the attentiveness of the congregation and what I learned from it. Afterwards testified to her intellectual stature. After the service, refreshments were served and an engaging couple from the neighborhood sang a number of Hebrew songs. The Israelis had come to Washington to teach in the Jewish school and to help the community with the holidays and master the readings from the Torah. The non-Israeli congregants very much appreciated their efforts, but I was unsure whether they would be replaced by other Israelis.

One of the most vocal participants in the singing was a young, bearded man who appeared to be in the wrong place. He was dressed in a smock and a hat resembling a fez, and he was one of the few men he did not put on a prayer shawl (*tallit*). I was surprised that he was Jewish but had learned all the prayers and songs, and he was singing at the synagogue on Saturdays. At one time he had been a cantor, but he had a shawl until he was advised that this would be inappropriate for a non-Jew. A congregant asked why he did not convert so he could be a cantor at home in the synagogue. He replied that he did not want to do that, even though he did want to continue attending services. He had learned to pray that elsewhere in Europe, especially in Germany, where he had learned to pray early participate in synagogue services. I first became interested in Judaism in 1986, when I attended services at the small synagogue in Washington. When I entered the hall I had difficulty at first in making my way to the cantor and asked a man what page in the prayer book he was on. The man became visibly agitated and mumbled something that he didn't know. I was surprised, but I quickly found the right place in the book on my own. After the service, the congregation went to another room for refreshments.

in Jewish rituals is a form of repentance for the T  
strasse, now Ulica Włodkowska, which had been  
fices of Jewish religious and charitable organizatio  
I remembered that the renowned Jewish Theolog  
almost directly across from the Storch Synagogue  
hole; not a trace of the building remained. As I st  
the wasteland, a man on the other side of the str  
me. I could not understand him, but he clearly su  
to no good. Later a Polish friend explained that h  
was a German interested in buying property in  
great fears of local citizens is that the Germans w  
claim the city, which had been inhabited overwh  
until 1945.

Although I was a boy of ten when I left Bresl  
bered a city with a sizable and affluent Jewish  
twenty-three thousand, the third largest in Germ  
educated Germans who identified fully as Jews, ha  
Hebrew and religious ritual, and supported an  
widely known for their excellence: the Jewish T  
the fountainhead of Conservative Judaism; a m  
treated Jews and Gentiles alike; a rigorous schoo  
gious and secular subjects; and a welfare program  
help to the needy. Now there was virtually no trac  
and even many of the streets where Jews used to l  
to rubble during the Second World War and were  
able, making me all the more curious about that  
1933, most Jews in Breslau believed that they wo  
and for some ten years a fair number of them did  
I wanted to find out how they had managed that  
with the persecution inflicted upon them? Were  
their institutions? Did they take all the necessary

and sister — made me all the more curious about the one-half of the Breslau Jewish community that survived the outbreak of World War II and that was almost annihilated. We managed to leave the country just in time to attribute our good fortune partly to our position in a free-market society. I think it was easier for us than for many other Jews to get out of our bags. My parents had moved to Breslau from Lodz in 1920 and never regarded themselves as German. As traditional and Orthodox Jews they were never surprised by the force of anti-Semitism. On the contrary, they accepted it as a force of nature, about which little could be done. My father retained Polish passports and I don't think that they ever sought German citizenship, which in any case would have been difficult to obtain. Still, it was not easy for them to give up their business, which was mainly managed by my mother. They managed to live comfortably. We had a roomy apartment in a building with a telephone, something of a luxury at the time. My father even employed a maid. During the summertime my father would go to Poland for several weeks to see our grandparents and on one occasion I spent a few weeks in the picturesque Zakopane at the foot of the Tatra Mountains alone. We had relatively few expenses, since the business was a small-scale operation. My parents sold a wide range of household goods on a payment plan to ordinary workers, who would pay cash for their purchases on Sunday morning when either my father or mother would be at home. By the late 1930s some customers refused to do business with Jews, but most continued to make the payments. My mother took along my sister, Esther, then twelve or thirteen years old, downstairs while she went to various apartments to collect payments. They sent her into the building because she did not speak German and would therefore not arouse the curiosity or perhaps the hostility of the customer's neighbors. Several greeted her with "Yo

after the Jewish holidays and then ate them.

During the early Hitler years we rarely experienced anti-Semitic incidents. We had never socialized with siblings and I attended a Jewish school, which furnished encounters with non-Jews. After the mid-1930s I was pestered in the street by youngsters who taunted me with a few punches at me, but when I was accompanied by my mother she was not very big but she was fearless, and would whip up anyone who dared to touch me. My clearest recollection of an anti-Semitic incident was actually of my own making. When Hitler came to Breslau, and I, as a boy of seven, would be “fun” to see him when he appeared on the balcony of the Monopol Hotel, and I persuaded my mother to accompany me. It turned out to have been a far more foolish venture than I could have known at the time. The windows who lived on the route of Hitler’s motorcade were ordered to have their windows closed. Whether the order was designed to prevent Jews or simply to prevent Jews from viewing the Führer, we did take one precaution. As we approached the balcony we took off our hats, which, as children from religiously Orthodox families, we wore. We thought that we would thus be able to avoid the stigma, and for a while we succeeded. As soon as Hitler appeared on the balcony, a German picked me up to get a better view. When I did not cheer—I knew that he was not cheering—I looked at my face and threw me down, yelling “damned Jew”. My cousin and I ran for our lives.

By the summer of 1938, my mother, who made the decisions in our family, decided that it was time to leave Breslau since the fall of 1937 the government had engaged in an especially savage campaign against Jews, prompting our family to devote most of our social gatherings to the question of emigration and the possibility of making a living in a foreign

also witty, remarked that if that was the case she was the “fourth year.” She was far from hostile to Zionism and prepared to begin a struggle for existence all over again. I was seven years old and suffered terribly from diabetes.

She wanted to go to the United States, but it was difficult to obtain a visa for the entire family. She therefore decided to obtain a visitor visa for my father, who, according to the family tradition, had his status to that of a permanent resident and then returned to New York. But even a visitor visa was not easily obtained. The United States consul in Breslau did not encourage my mother, but she would give one to my father, but she refused. My mother returned to his office several times and made clear—she told him I don’t know—that it would be worth his while to give her a visitor visa. Finally, he relented and told her to return on Saturday morning with the promised gift, 500 marks, worth of money at the time. My father refused to go to the consulate because he would not touch money or carry anything on his kerchief, on the Sabbath. I was chosen as the messenger, the age of ten, not yet having celebrated the Bar Mitzvah, and I was guilty of a sin. I carried out the mission and have never regretted by the illegality or the potential sinfulness of my mission. I was scheduled to leave from Holland early in November 1938. Exciting and dramatic events would take place before long.

Early in October 1938, on Succoth (the Jewish holiday of the Feast of Tabernacles), my family celebrated a holiday together for the last time. We invited other families at our synagogue to take the evening service (or booth). According to tradition, the succah has to be made of vegetation and was festively decorated with tree boughs. We were all standing while the introductory prayer (Kabbalat Shabbat) was being recited when suddenly a brick came crashing through the roof, hitting my brother Max and me on the arm. The head of a

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler.  
The snare is broken, and we are escaped.

Fearing further attacks by Nazis, we immediately fled our apartment at home.

Two and a half weeks later, at about 7 PM on Thursday, just as we were about to sit down to supper, I heard a man whistling a Zionist melody in the street in front of our apartment. I looked out the window and saw Alice Friedländer waving wildly. Strangers could not get into our apartment without ringing the bell of the superintendent, but since he was Jewish, he did not trust we had an arrangement with friends. He thought we would recognize as a signal to come down and check. When we saw Alice in her agitated state, my sister ran down to see. Alice's father had been a police officer who, as a Jew, was dismissed in 1933, but he was much liked by the men in the force. On Thursday he went to the station house to play cards. He was informed that the police were about to round up Jews. He apparently did not know for what purpose. Suspecting a trap, he told his daughter about the impending action. In the evening, following Alice's warning, we left the apartment, our direction was to go and walk the streets. After a few hours we decided to go to the Polish consulate, which enjoyed the rights of extraterritoriality. As Polish citizens, we expected to be granted asylum.

We stayed there, together with perhaps two hundred others, until midday on Friday, when the consul informed us that if we leave within a few hours he would waive the rights of extraterritoriality and permit the police to take us into custody. My sister went with Mr. and Mrs. Hadda, two art teachers at the school, to let her stay at their apartment. They agreed and we were picked up by two of our cousins. "We were warmly received."

at their home. We remained in hiding there until the next day, when the crisis had blown over. We learned over the weekend the police had come to our apartment to arrest us. Had we been apprehended, we would have been taken to the border to Poland, where we would almost certainly have been ordered by the Nazis after they occupied the country. If we had been lucky, we would have managed to escape, as did a number of other refugees from Germany who later have spent several years in Siberia.

Early in November 1938, days after the roundup of Polish Jews for the United States, just in time to miss the Holocaust, Polish Jews were not apprehended at that time. My mother concluded that we could not wait until my father became a U.S. resident, and could then reunite the remainder of the family. She decided that my three older siblings (my oldest brother, fourteen years old) should try to emigrate on their own. My oldest brother, Henry, had been active in the Zionist movement, which provided him with an older brother, Henry, obtained a temporary visa to enter the U.S. (training camp) in Great Britain, and he left in March 1939. My brother, Max, secured a certificate for Palestine at the same time. My sister, just turned fifteen, also went to the U.S. (April 1, 1939). I vividly remember the tearful scene as one after another member of our family left. My mother remained resolute and even then, before Nazi persecution turned to mass murder, she never regretted her decision to send her children to their family. One of her sisters, who also lived in Breslau, wanted to send her older children to leave on their own, but she was opposed by her husband or her youngest child, who was still in the city. Three remained in the city and were murdered by the Nazis. Can we blame a mother for not wanting to be separated from her child and her husband?



exhausting the few thousand marks my parents had on the mattress.” My father made every effort to get a job. And he had not been able to find a job. He considered moving to Palestine, where he thought he would have a better position to help us emigrate and where, most probably, it would be easier to be. But my mother was dead set against the move. In Palestine it would be even more difficult for him to find a job. My mother, a rational and very outspoken woman, she did not consider it for me, even though I was only ten years old. On March 1933, I wrote the following postcard to my father:

Dearest Father:

Dear Mama is so agitated because you wrote that she should go to a Kibbutz [in Palestine] that she doesn't write to you. It is not right, but what can I do? She yells all the time that she will reach 7th Heaven, so one cannot get into the US from there. Dear Father, you must not give up so quickly. We must have hope. Go to Cuba [necessary at the time to become a permanent resident], take care of everything. Reflect on the problems I are facing. We are also not giving up, [and] we will do more than you to do so. Mama has to take a job. She has to work hard enough. Don't go to a Kibbutz. Mama does not want to go. I wrote this postcard; I saved money so I could write this to you. Please hold out and be clever. Greetings and kisses, Isi [in the time].<sup>3</sup>

My father remained in New York City, where at the time he learned to polish and repair furniture, enabling him to start a second-hand furniture store. Eventually, he managed to get a visa, but it took him almost four years to acquire residence. In that time, he could not get us out of Germany. For a while, my father's brother Henry, who had settled in London, found a way to get us out. He went from one office to another seeking information. He eventually obtained a visa for us. One requirement was to persuade

the understanding that we would tend for our services in England. Even then it was possible to obtain a visa for England on restrictive conditions: we could stay in England for a limited period. My mother would have to work as a domestic servant in England. I would have to place me in a boys' home to free her for work. My mother, a woman in her late forties who was serious and practical, would be able to run a household was not very pleased with the prospect of doubts about the arrangement, but a friend, also a woman, argued that once she set foot in England no one would dare ask her to take up work as a domestic servant. Wisely, my mother agreed to all the conditions.

Some time in mid-June 1939, the doorbell rang in the apartment in Breslau. Two tall Gestapo agents came to the door. On learning that no adult was home, informed my mother to deliver an *Ausweisungsbefehl* (Order of Expulsion). Too young to be intimidated, I told them proudly that my father was in Berlin to pick up a visa for us. The two men left without a word, and about four weeks later my mother and I left Breslau for Hamburg, where we boarded a boat for Southampton.

Once we were settled in a small apartment in Southampton, we paid a visit to the lady who had acted as our contact. Impressed by her spacious home and even more by her hospitality, she served us tea. I don't remember how we communicated, but she knew some Yiddish, or perhaps Henry by now knew some English, to serve as our interpreter. About two weeks later, my mother accompanied me to the boys' home in Croydon, then in the care of the Home Office. The director of the home turned out to be some German, also from Breslau, and that made my initiation into my new life a little less daunting. Not much. The director, a gentle man, took me to a room that housed several other Jewish boys from Breslau. I had cried as a child, but that first night when I went

up a post as a domestic servant or, in fact, do a Jewish Board of Guardians agreed to support her check—I believe it amounted to 25 shillings, just most basic expenses.

I was immediately enrolled in a neighborhood virtually no English I could not communicate with this was not a serious drawback since I could communicate with boys from Germany and Austria. But my ignorance was a problem when, on one of the first Sundays at the Stamford Hill to visit my mother. I had to take the bus to get there and I had no idea how to find the bus stations. The director noted my mother's address and gave me a piece of cardboard that he hung around my neck. The drivers were all very helpful and told me when to get on and off, but once I was on the bus I had no necessary connections, but once I was on the bus I had no idea how to proceed. I would turn to a pedestrian, who would take me on my chest and then take me to the next stop. After a while a pedestrian I approached, realizing that I was a refugee, would give me a penny or twopence. The money would go a long way back, and by the time I returned to the boys' school I had quite a few pennies, more than enough to buy a sandwich to consume till my next trip. Though linguistically challenged, my trips to Stamford Hill and back began to appeal to me. My excursions soon came to an end. Within days after the start of World War II, on September 3, the boys at the school and the children from the school we attended, were evacuated to a safe place from German bombers.

We were sent to Southwick, then a small, sleepy village in West Sussex, a couple of miles from Brighton and Croydon, implementing a plan devised by the government to place families in Southwick to accommodate children as a

and we did not know where we would end up. The letter, who had recently come to Britain from Vienna, was an elderly couple who owned a small, attractive house with a room. The couple received us with great warmth from the beginning that relations between us would be good. They had no children of their own, they had never met anyone from the continent, and they certainly had never laid eyes on a Jew. The household, a railway conductor, seemed delighted to have us in the house, and he and his wife went out of their way to be comfortable.

But on the very first day of our stay in our new home there were some awkward moments. As we sat down for the first time to tell our hosts in my broken English that I was a Jew and ate kosher food. They had never heard of the Jewish religion, and I knew too little English to offer a coherent explanation of serving them. Actually, I was not particularly religious, but I was losing my faith because of the example set by my hosts. I greatly admired Max, six years older than I, who was a very gifted student, especially in foreign languages. From 1935 he delivered a twenty-minute talk in modern Hebrew, composed on his own and that made a strong impression on me, and soon he was something of a celebrity in the Jewish community. Max also had a fine voice and after his talks he regularly chanted the weekly portion of the Old Testament in the synagogues, for which he was paid. Perhaps his fame came from the discovery of a small error in a new German edition of the Old Testament by the renowned scholar Martin Buber. Buber wrote to Buber to point out the error and received a reply promising to correct the mistake in future editions.

One morning—this was probably in 1938—while I was reading his phylacteries and reading his prayers, I noticed some books in his hands. On examining them, I discovered

gious convictions have been shaky, but like many strong attachment to our Jewish heritage. When billeted on Gentiles I made the decision that I kosher food, and for the four years I lived in Brita resolve. I am now convinced that my decision w if the anti-Semites were out to destroy us I wou to Jewish traditions. I would do my bit to prese Judaism.

I doubt that I was fully aware of my motives ea when I tried to explain to the kind but puzzled ra his wife why I would not eat their meat. Still, they decision and agreed to serve me only vegetables. B other awkward moment: the hostess had put gra the potatoes that she placed in front of me. I wou and, once again, my English was too rudimenta tried to point out that the gravy was also not kosh understand me, shook their heads, and simply r an issue of my food preferences. It may be that consulted someone—perhaps their minister—wh about the elementary principles of Judaism. In their home in Southwick for about ten months, came increasingly cordial, especially once I learn and could tell them about my family background.

However, Peter did not stay for more than a fe couple could not handle him. Peter was a rather youngster, terribly pained by the fact that both h in Vienna, and his unhappiness made it difficult f bladder while he was asleep. Our hosts were tot derstanding the problem and sought to shame hi Every time he wet his bed they put a large sign on ing room chair proclaiming in large letters that he Of course, this treatment did not cure Peter, and

and our headmaster was ordered to move all the children to Guildford, Surrey. The move was to be completed in a few days even though the headmaster could not find a home in time. We arrived in Guildford in buses at midday with between two and three hundred children with their parents to knock on doors to ask for a home. Many local residents responded positively to the request but they looked over the children and almost invariably picked English children. Towards the end of the day the English pupils had found a home, leaving the refugee boys to wonder what their fate would be. Finally, at about 10.30, an officer in the fire department came out from the station on Ashenden Road and announced in a gruff voice that he had found a home for the foreign children, including me. I immediately took my things but I could hardly refuse the assignment. As soon as we got home he ordered us to help him with his chores, mow the lawn, sweep the veranda, polis around the house, clean the shed, and polish the car. The next day, as soon as we returned from school, he came to see us for us and expressed impatience if we did not work. It was not what we were supposed to be doing and I immediately explained to the headmaster, Mr. Powell. Mr. Powell was a giant I had ever seen—well over six and a half feet—very kind and full of kindness, especially for the refugees. After a few days the thumb of the fireman we were placed down the street. He was much more gentle and spoke freely about the situation. One of the three of their own children and the mother was staying in the house running the enlarged household. After two weeks we moved again, to the third home in three weeks.

I and one other refugee moved in with Mr. and Mrs. Ings who lived on Ashenden Road. The Ings were in their early thirties and successful—he was a butcher who ran his own business. He was the first couple who accommodated us in Southwicks.

some candy that we planned to eat while in bed. Mrs. Ing suspected us of having candy, but that our room before we had fallen asleep on the pile of some linen. She lingered for a long time and heard us eat candy. She asked us what we were eating and we flew into a rage. How dare we buy candy without her permission between us deteriorated very quickly and on one day she scolded us for some alleged misdeed, called us "Jews" and explained to Mr. Powell, who immediately arranged for a trial in our presence asked them about the incident. They denied the charge and Mr. Powell simply listened to our explanation that he believed them. But within a few weeks I was yet again. I was billeted with the Holcombes, a simple family who treated me with great kindness. I stayed there for the fourth one in eight months, for about two and a half years.

By this time I was an easy and inexpensive guest. I ate my major meals at home. A number of Jewish families had moved to Guildford and the ever thoughtful Mr. Powell arranged to give me kosher meals. The Jewish families did not have to put me up, but almost every day of the week a couple would come in for dinner. I believe that on Thursdays I was always invited. My family that kept some sewing machines in their home had a tailor. While doing his work, the head of the household would come to me with a smile as I ate the kosher food. He was glad to be helping a refugee, and pleased that I still observed the Jewish tradition. On Saturdays I was often received at the home of the owner of several movie houses in London. There I would have a lavish meal and a bit of pocket money, which my mother was in no position to send me any.

I stayed in touch with my mother and occasionally my father; the mail from New York during wartime was slow to reach England. I learned from them that my sister and

Guildford, although it was a rather modest affair. My father, a rabbi, was a prominent figure in the community, and his presence was a great honor. He was wearing a clerical collar—the title and attire of a rabbi—rather than that of the Chief Rabbi—which came to Guildford for the event. I had had rigorous training in Hebrew in London, so it was relatively easy for me to learn the parts. I had to learn how to deliver parts of the weekly portion of the Torah. Only five local Jews attended the service in a makeshift synagogue. I was the only member of my family who was present. My father's younger brother could not afford to attend—he was still in London. The only present my father could afford was a pair of shoes. I wrote some commentaries on the weekly Torah portion.

Every few months I managed a trip to London. It was a dangerous time, and invariably there would be a bombing blitz during the night in the underground (subway) for safety. We had special equipment we were instructed to carry everywhere. I had a gas mask. I never needed one, but I did see many private homes had been reduced by Nazi bombs.

As I write these lines, I am saddened by my father's death, but I don't believe that I was terribly unhappy about it. At the school I attended, the teachers were all very kind and I made progress in my studies. In January 1942 I was promoted to the school in which I had been enrolled to the Ellice School for Girls and Boys, where I would receive the training to compete for entrance to a university. In a testimonial letter, Ms. Emily M. Hewetson, wrote for me before I left for the States in 1943, she praised my accomplishments, "gradually worked . . . [my] way up to the top of the 10th Form just beginning IV th Form work this term. In the class we planned to read *The Merchant of Venice* and the teacher suggested that I take the role of Shylock. I practiced at home and at first was rather dismayed by the part I had been picked to perform. But then I did



argument. Twenty-two years later, in 1964, during my stay in London since the war, I telephoned Mr. Drakes; he invited me to his house, served me a meal—no non-kosher food for my satisfaction—and reminded me of my reading of the speech.

On Saturday afternoon, July 17, 1943, while waiting for the theater in central Guildford, I suddenly heard someone speak in an agitated tone. I looked up and was summoned to the office immediately. Word had reached the Holcombes that my mother had been assigned to a boat that would leave for the United States. I learned that I would have to depart for London as soon as possible. We had been for several weeks that we had been granted an immigration visa because of wartime conditions and the German U-boats. We were not told when we could expect places on a ship. Eventually, the office simply informed that we would leave within a few days. Before our departure we were told that we would enter the United States at a port near Bristol on the southwest coast. We did not know when we would arrive in the United States. The ship that left on July 22 was a merchant marine vessel making a return trip carrying war materiel in England, and it had room for several passengers. Hours before our departure we learned that it was part of a large convoy—of perhaps thirty or more ships—guarded by several destroyers that moved rapidly between the United States and England. I was miserable from sea sickness almost the entire trip. The agony ended when we landed in Halifax, Canada, a place I had never heard of. To reach New York we had to take a train. The railway schedule was very unpredictable and we waited in Halifax for three days before beginning the last leg of our journey.

The Canadian authorities considered my mother and I enemy aliens because Poland was under Nazi occupation. It struck me as absurd then and that I still cannot understand why, if we were not spying for the Germans, we were held in

rence of Jeffrey Veidinger, then a very able student at university and now a professor at the University of Toronto in Canada. I told him about my experience in Halifax and that the rabbi there who, among other things, supervised activities and helped incoming refugees, was his grandfather.

On August 9 my mother and I, accompanied by a Vermont Policeman, boarded a train for New York City. The policeman stayed with us, and never let us out of his sight. When we reached Vermont he politely bade us goodbye and left us.

The reunion with my father was emotional but not surprising. I had been living with him for almost five years, I was not surprised. I remembered him as a kind, somewhat reserved man, very proud of his children and saw to our needs, but let us go our own way in the world. Despite his deep religious beliefs he was not intolerant, and as long as we appeared to be following the essential rules of Judaism he was satisfied, especially when we were confident that we were all ambitious and would do our best. In the late 1940s he knew that Max had completely abandoned Jewish practices, but he never held that against him because he wanted to build the state of Israel.

During my four years in Britain, I, too, had strayed from the path but I knew that so long as I lived at home I would have to follow my father's lifestyle: I would have to wear a hat at all times, pray at all prayers, attend synagogue regularly, and resume my studies. Since I had not continued my Jewish studies in England, I had fallen far behind Orthodox boys of my generation from other religious backgrounds, which ruled out attendance at the Yeshiva. My father understood that and allowed me to enroll in the Yeshiva High School in Washington Heights.

There I received a solid education that prepared me for college, known as a poor man's college with high standards, for the working class. Even though my father could

as literature, politics, movies, and sports. During my first year at City College, my father's second-hand furniture was worn and robust, declined precipitately and I began to think about work full-time, although I had no particular skills. I wanted me to get a job with good prospects for a career. I wanted to pay any tuition at City College and every summer I worked as a waiter in the Catskills, but my earnings covered only my food and my spending money. I spoke to an administrator who had discussed my predicament with him; I asked whether I could take leave of absence, but he strongly advised against it. He said that I would regret not completing my education, that without a degree I would not be able to pursue a rewarding profession. Fortunately, I took his advice and with my mother's help I continued my undergraduate education; for a while it was a hand to mouth existence, but somehow we managed.

There were other reasons for the restrained reaction. My mother's health had taken a dangerous turn and she had been in the United States for only five years—she died in 1947, aged seven. We were also concerned about the twenty-five relatives who had remained in Breslau or Poland—my father had five brothers and his sisters and one of his brothers, and my mother had a brother, as well as several nieces, nephews, and grandchildren. Relations with them had ceased and although in 1943 we could not know the extent of the Nazi atrocities, we knew enough to be afraid that there were the three children in our family who had not come from us. Henry was in England and did not join us until 1947, whom none of us had seen in nine years, came to the United States in 1947. Max remained in Palestine, later Israel, and, although my parents, Henry, and I could not afford to visit him until seventeen years after he left Breslau, did we see him? How did we somehow scraped together enough money to finance his trip to him to the United States. He never did see our mother.

than to attend study groups led by his rabbi. He was taught at various Jewish schools and ended up as a member of a large synagogue in Fairlawn, New Jersey. He was a successful teacher of Hebrew in Plainview, Long Beach, and held various important positions in Jewish educational institutions. He had a talent of remarkable resourcefulness and unusual energy. He studied at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where he was a member of the Hebrew language. He became professor of that language at the university and published several scholarly studies on the history of a number of translations into Hebrew of works by medieval Jewish scholars. He died in 1976 at the age of fifty-four. I attended the University of Columbia University, where I was awarded a doctorate in history. I began my teaching career at Brooklyn College and became a professor of history at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. For some fifty years, I concentrated on the history of late imperial Russia (roughly from the 1870s to the 1910s). I wondered about the fate of the Jewish community in Poland, whose plight was far more afflictive than that of the Jews in Russia. When I retired from teaching in January 2003, I read the history of Breslau and soon made my first prolonged visit to Poland, which had annexed Breslau after World War II. The archives in Poland contained information that answered the questions I had pondered over the past six decades.

The triumph of Nazism in 1933 came as a terrible shock to the Jews of Germany, but the shock may have hit the Jews of Breslau especially hard. As residents of one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Germany, many considered a resurgence of intense hostility toward Jews inconceivable. For over half a century, from the 1860s to 1933, Breslau Jews had made enormous progress in integrating into German society. A large number had succeeded as businessmen, lawyers, physicians, and, to

higher education, and social relations with Gentiles than close. Yet to many Jews these obstacles were v  
bound to be erased in time. If the Jews of Breslau  
have been full “insiders” in society; if, as the histor  
has suggested, they did not quite feel “at home” i  
also not be called “outsiders” anymore.<sup>4</sup> By severa  
indistinguishable from the rest of society; the vast  
the others, spoke their language, fully identified w  
culture, and were patriotic to the core, as they had  
in supporting their country during the First World

Once the Nazis took over, Breslau, to the surpr  
into one of the more ardent centers of Nazi power  
Nazis a higher percentage of its votes than any ot  
leading officials pursued Hitler’s policies so avidly  
year of Nazi rule even some party leaders in Berl  
lau was moving too fast in implementing govern  
cially those designed to rid the economy of Jews  
not faze the Gauleiters and police chiefs in Bresla  
ten years often took the lead in introducing anti  
though the overall pattern in the city was similar  
the country.

To understand the reaction of the Jews to the  
directed at them, it must be kept in mind that th  
Jewish campaign that pointed from the beginning  
goal, and it is not at all certain that in 1933 the  
settled on a long-range plan of action. They were  
and impoverish the Jewish community and they  
leave the country. Beyond that, the Nazi campa  
proceeded in stages: beginning in 1933 they wer  
professions and on April 1 their businesses wer  
the government enacted the racial laws designed  
between Jews and so-called Aryans, and seized

minated. Although from the beginning of the 1930s Jews were subjected to physical attacks and at times imprisoned, and if incarcerated, they were not killed en masse until 1942. In 1934 to 1938, the anti-Jewish campaign actually abated somewhat, and even in 1938 relatively few of the large number of Jews in the camps (compared to those murdered in 1942) were killed. Most were released and those who had visas were allowed to leave as they could prove that they would soon leave the country. It had become clear that the Nazis planned, in order to stabilize and drive the Jews out of Germany, and the majority of Jews fled once the Second World War broke out in September 1939. Opportunities for emigration dwindled to a trickle and the Jewish population of Breslau was trapped.

There can be no doubt that Nazi policies toward Jews were motivated in large measure by racial ideology, by the conviction that Jews were an inferior race who were corroding German society and economy at every turn. The decrees and memoranda issued and written by Nazi officials in Breslau, many of them couched in terms of their deep loathing for the minority in their midst, often debated the amount of Jewish blood that would make up a percentage of the Aryan race, and I am convinced that in pursuing their policies toward Jews they believed they were engaged in a worthwhile and as intellectually legitimate enterprise.

But the more I read the Nazi documents, the more I became convinced that ideological fanaticism does not tell the whole story. It certainly does not explain the growing support for, or the acceptance of, Nazi policies among the people of Breslau. I was struck by the brutishness and sadism of Nazi leaders, who in their pursuit of their goals made no effort to conceal their determination to seize power and control the state, and often for themselves. More than a few of these leaders had histories of criminality. In addition, Nazi officials of high rank and great wealth seized from Jews should be widely distributed.

sponsored such organizations as the local chamber of commerce whose opinions invariably protected the interests of the Jews. Greed and envy of the Jews played a critical role in the policies toward them, which helps explain why so many people would look the other way when the government undertook actions they might otherwise have frowned upon. Rather than Nazism in purely ideological terms, I think it would be more to characterize it as bestiality in the service of ideological goals.

This is not to say that all Breslauers applauded the Nazis. In reading the memoirs of Breslau Jews, I came across references to acts of kindness and expressions of disapproval, and I have made a point of recording these. Such acts carried risks, but I mention them not simply because they were interesting and often quite dramatic. They reveal an humanity of life in Nazi Germany and they shed light on the attitudes of many Jews in Breslau. Understandably, when persecuted they encountered so widely after 1933, they were influenced by their own experiences that by no means all their contemporaries applauded the conduct of the new regime. Descriptions among the Jews, but for a few years at least that could be explained by hope that Nazism was a passing phase, that Germany would turn to "normalcy."

From the moment Hitler came to power, the Jews of Breslau gave a two-pronged response to the new order, maintaining the opening of their own institutions and transforming their economy," a necessity in view of the Nazi decrees that excluded Jews in the professions. Physical resistance or disobedience was out of the question, as Jews constituted a small part of the population of Breslau—and less than 1 percent of Germany as a whole. But I would argue that in their own institutions the Jews of Breslau adopted a stance of passive resistance. They categorically denied the

sponsored lectures on subjects of Jewish concern; emphasis on religious observance; maintained the Jewish schools on all odds; and, perhaps most remarkably, increased Jewish social services, which were desperately needed as more and more Jews lost their livelihood. In short, the Jewish community did not abandon either the institutions or the values that had sustained it for decades and that had been the mainstay and distinctive character of the Jewish community.

Within one month of the Nazi takeover, local Jewish institutions established new offices to deal with long-range structural problems of the community: one dispensed advice on retraining for manual labor, for work either in Germany or abroad; another specialized in the intricate issues of emigration and helped a large number among the younger generation—who believed there was no future for them in Germany. These ambitious projects required careful planning, extensive negotiations between Jewish and non-Jewish approaches to difficult and painful challenges, and a great deal of sacrifice. The achievements were not derisory, in large measure because the members of the community generously supported them. In the wake of the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, over one half of the Jewish population of Breslau had emigrated, and many of those who remained survived as long as they did only because of the help provided by Jewish institutions.

Although I have included the experiences of the Jewish community during the Nazi period, this book is based mainly on published and unpublished sources, of which there is a vast amount: biographies, diaries, letters, newspapers, statements, and reports collected by various archives after the war, a huge number of documents by Nazi officials in Breslau, and, finally, the archives of the Jewish community of Breslau which, to my surprise, remained intact.

Thanks to the efforts of an enterprising rabbi, the Jewish community of the Jews of Breslau maintained one of the best-organized



pler persuaded community leaders to finance the materials, and on August 1, 1924, the project was completed. With the later help of Rabbi Bernhard Brillung, completed by the early 1930s, but during the Nazi period continued to collect and file documents, which bear

The Nazis wanted the documents preserved because they would be useful in their studies of racial differences and Aryans. Dr. Arlt, the chief of the Office of Racial Affairs in Breslau, actually planned to establish an institute in Breslau for investigation of the Jewish question on the basis of the archive's findings. In 1943, when the Jewish community was liquidated, the archive was transferred for safekeeping to the nearby Cosel Jewish Cemetery near Breslau, at that time a German town. Whether the Nazis did not know that it had been moved to the cemetery or had simply forgotten about it is unclear. It remained there until Russian troops found it in 1945 and shipped it to Warsaw, where it is now housed and preserved.

Rich as they are, these sources do not answer all the questions, but they do contain enough information to reconstruct and analyze the conduct of a major center of German Jewry during a period of unparalleled persecution that ended in