

A STORY FROM
KRISTALLNACHT

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*I lived a life
of lies in order
to survive.*

— EHUD LEV

Ehud Lev

(Herbert Josef Odenheimer)



BÜHL, GERMANY
AGE 4½ IN NOVEMBER 1938

Born on March 26, 1934, in Bühl, Baden, Germany, to Hugo and Julchen Odenheimer.

On Kristallnacht, he was only four and a half years old. Years later, Ehud recounts the event through the eyes of a small child. On the night between November 9 and 10, 1938, the synagogue of Bühl was set on fire, and an inflamed non-Jewish German crowd also reached his family's home. The house was attacked and damaged.

In October 1940, the 26 Jews who remained in Bühl, together with the Jews of the Baden region, were deported to southern France, where they were imprisoned in the Gurs internment camp near the Spanish border. Hundreds died from diseases such as malaria, typhus, and dysentery, including Ehud's grandmother.

In February 1941, the OSE, a Jewish organization dedicated to children's welfare and health in France, managed to get a group of children out of the camp and into its children's homes. Ehud was among them. His parents agreed to part with their only son and entrust his fate to strangers.

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Ehud survived the rest of the war in hiding, moving between institutions and private homes and living in constant fear. To stay alive, he had to shed his German-Jewish identity: he took new names, learned French, and learned to pass as an ordinary French child.

Members of the OSE moved Ehud from one institution to another so that he would not be caught. At the end of 1942, after an increase in the frequency of arrests of Jewish children, it was decided that it would be safer for the children to be hidden with Christian families.



Ehud Loeb with his father Hugo in Buehl, Germany before the war. The family home is in the background.

Ehud suffered greatly with the first family with whom he stayed. But he did not complain and tried to be obedient. When OSE social workers saw his condition, they decided to move him to the home of Jules and Jeanne Roger in Bouzençais, where he was received with warmth and love. When the danger increased, Ehud was moved to other places for several weeks, until the danger passed and he could return to the Roger family home. In 1989, Jules and Jeanne Roger were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations.

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THIS IS HOW HE RECOUNTED IT YEARS LATER:

“Only Louise Roger and the parish priest knew my true identity. I had complete command of the French language and I even spoke in the local dialect. I was a good student, I was an altar boy and helped the priest with preparing mass, I did so expertly; I studied and knew the prayers in Latin. I lived a life of lies in order to survive.”

Ehud survived; his parents were murdered in the Holocaust. After the war he immigrated to Israel. Dr. Ehud Loeb is an art historian and worked at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. At the same time, he volunteered at Yad Vashem and was also a member of the commission for the designation of the Righteous Among the Nations.

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*You will not
take him, I will
not let you, he
did nothing.*

— ESTHER MOSES GEVER



Esther Gever

(Esther Moses Gever)



VIENNA, AUSTRIA

AGE 8½ IN NOVEMBER 1938

Born on April 14, 1930, in Vienna, Austria. At the time of Kristallnacht, she was eight and a half years old.

For Esther, Kristallnacht was first and foremost the moment when the threat to the Jews of Vienna took on a tangible face within her own family. Men of the regime came to take her father. She tried to protect him, an almost impossible gesture by a small girl confronting men of the regime.

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This is how she recounted it years later:

“They came, went from building to building, from apartment to apartment, knocked on the doors, pulled the men outside. They could not resist, because if they resisted they beat them. They were violent. They came to take my father. Because I was close to my father, I held onto his arm and resisted and stood in front of them, contrary to the way my mother had raised me, and I said: No, you cannot take my father. Why would you take him? Why?”

And he said, because he is a dirty Jew, and I said, you will not take him, I will not let you, he did nothing. At that moment he grabbed me and threw me against the wall, and I fainted and I do not remember anything else.”

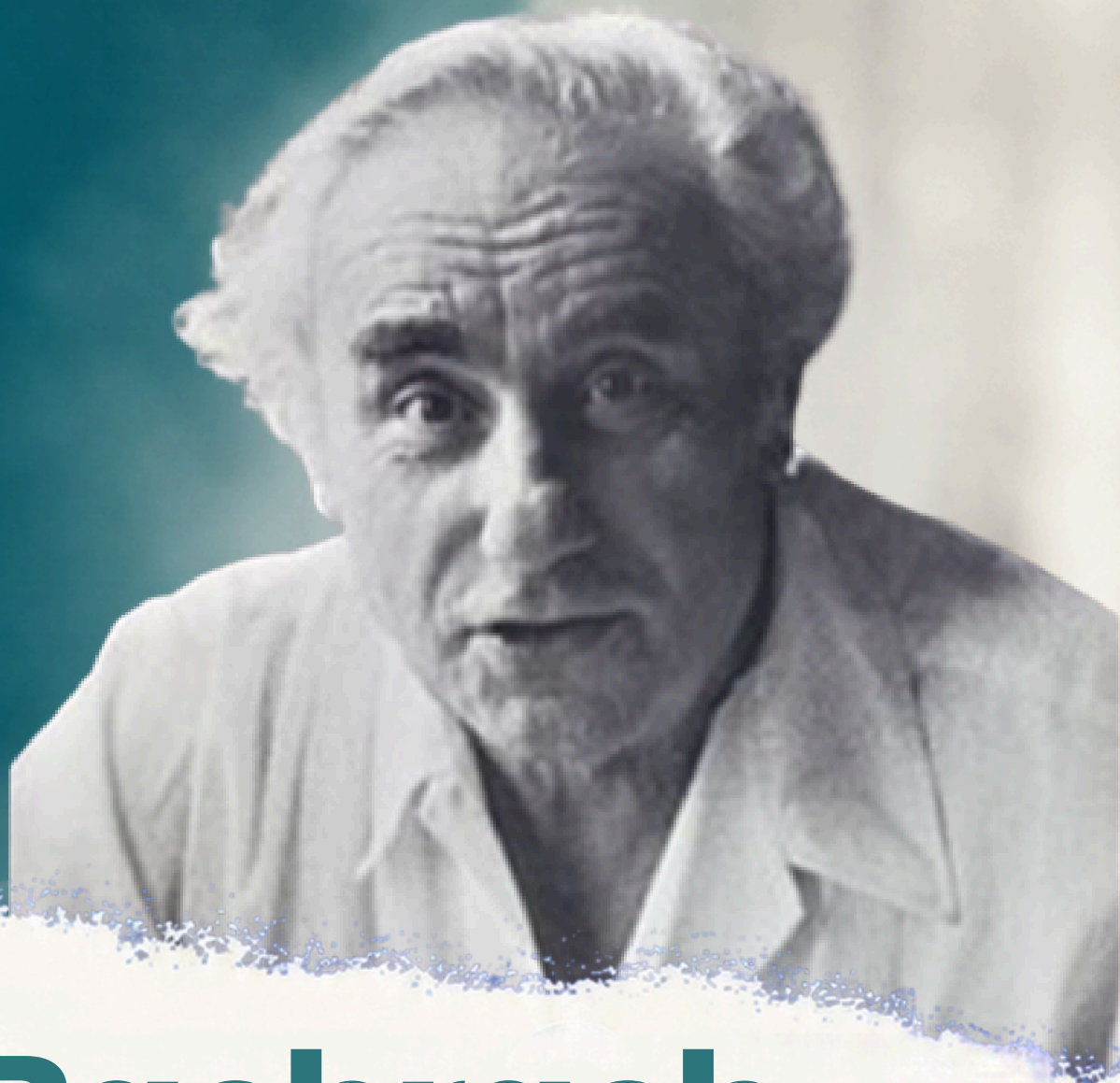
“I remember waking up at night to screams from the street. They beat the men and cut off their beards until their faces were bleeding... They forced elderly men to clean the street while kneeling on the ground.”

After the Kristallnacht pogrom, she and her family fled to different areas of Poland that, following an agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union, came under Soviet control. From there they were forced to flee and moved through several places. They lived in hiding, in poverty, between life and death, with danger hovering over them day and night. During this period she lost her mother and her grandfather and grandmother. From there she moved to the Caucasus with her father and younger sister. Esther was in the Soviet Union, in the Caucasus region, when the war ended. In 1946, she returned to Poland and met her future husband, Sol Shlomo Gever. They married in 1948 and together immigrated to Israel in 1959, and from there to the United States. They had two daughters: Otilia and Dorin.

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No answer. No one answered her.

PROF. ZVI BACHRACH



Prof. Zvi Bachrach



HANAU, GERMANY

Zvi-Walter Bachrach was born in 1928 in Hanau. (Died in 2014.) He grew up in an assimilated German-Jewish family; his father fought in the German army in the First World War and was awarded a medal for bravery by the German army. His father worked in banking and commerce. Even before Kristallnacht, Bachrach remembered how Hitler Youth boys (members of the youth movement of the Nazi Party) waited for Jewish children outside the school, threw stones at them, and beat them. Once, he came home covered in blood after being attacked and called a “damned Jew.”

In his testimony, Bachrach describes the days before Kristallnacht and the violence in the streets against Jews. He explains that Kristallnacht “did not fall from the sky.” As a child, Zvi had already seen how his former friends became his persecutors. Then November 9–10 arrived. What was etched into his memory was not only the destruction, but the collapse of his parents’ trust in German society.

According to him, until 1938 his parents had never considered leaving Germany. They believed that the persecution was “only an episode.” On Kristallnacht, that illusion shattered.

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This is how he recounted it:

“That was the heart of the problem of German Jewry: It was so much a part of German society that the Nazi blow hit it from within. Until 1938 my parents never thought of leaving Germany. “There's no way the Germans we live with will continue to do these things. It's only an episode.” That was the atmosphere. It was also the atmosphere on Kristallnacht. They couldn't comprehend it. It came as a blow. I remember my mother standing pale and crying... I remember her phoning her gentile friends – she had more gentile friends than Jewish friends – No answer. No one answered her”.

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According to his testimony, the crisis of trust on Kristallnacht was not only about those who used violence, smashed windows, and looted Jewish property, but also about those who no longer picked up the telephone.

After Kristallnacht, the Bachrach family fled to the Netherlands, but after the Germans occupied the Netherlands in May 1940, the family members were captured. Zvi went through the camps of Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. In March 1945, Zvi, his father, and his brother were taken on a death march. Along the way, their father was shot to death in front of his sons. Zvi and his brother survived and were liberated by American soldiers.

He immigrated to Israel, became a historian and researcher of antisemitism and the Holocaust at Bar-Ilan University, and died in 2014.



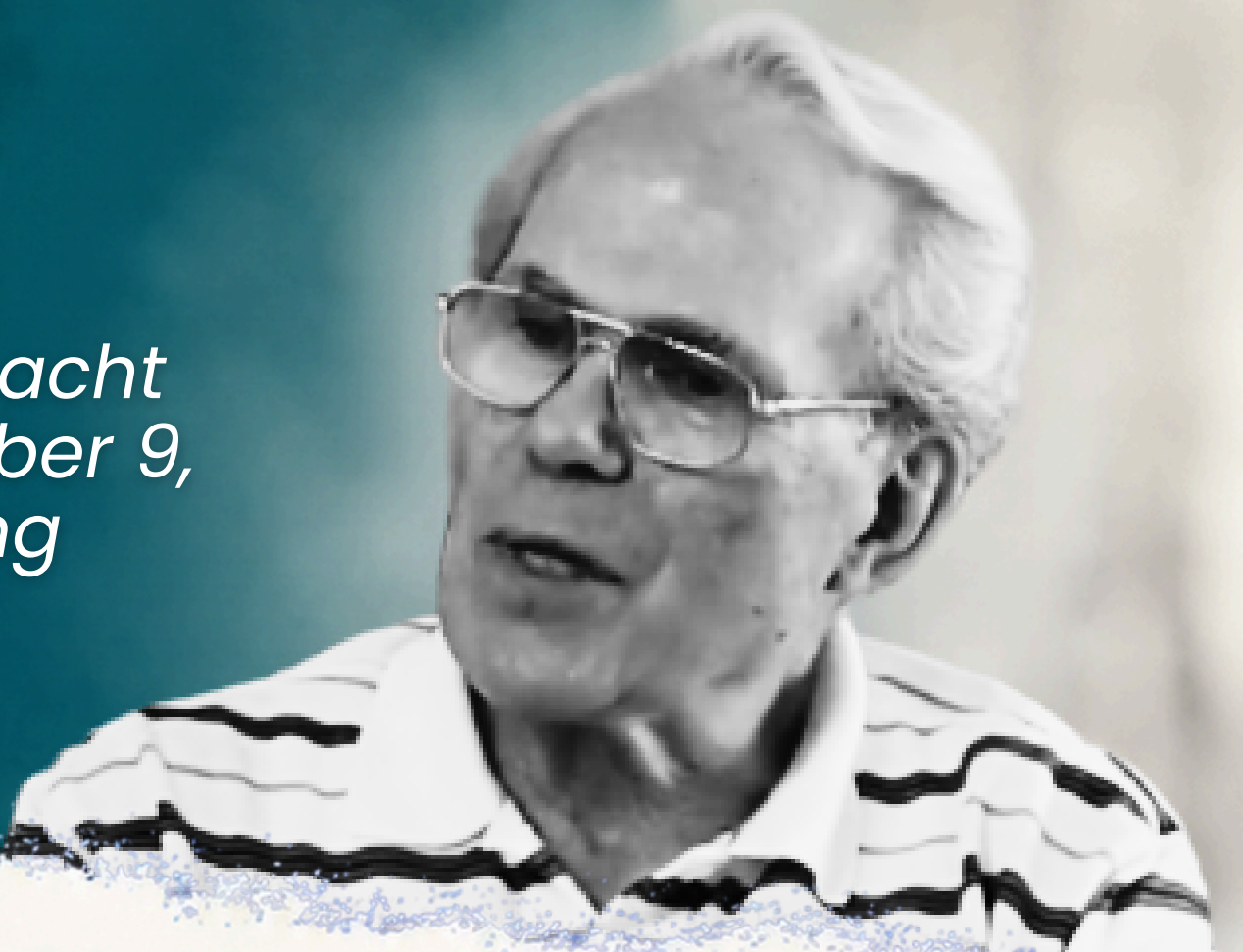
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“After I was fortunate enough to be saved from the inferno, I had to decide, within myself, whether to sink into my traumatic past or try to build a new life for myself. I chose the second option. Looking back, I am not sure whether this was truly a choice or rather a basic, deep-rooted desire for personal renewal;... I cannot speak on behalf of other Holocaust survivors, but as for myself I can say with certainty that after liberation in 1945 I was neither mature nor level-headed. And could I have been mature and level-headed after 38 months of imprisonment in ghettos and various concentration camps? My encounter with new freedom was difficult because the gradual adjustment to normal life demanded all of my mental strength. ...Now I tried to get to the root of my Jewish identity, to understand what is included in the concept “Jew” and what that concept meant to me. ... I sought to understand and establish my Jewish existence without connection to my dark past.... The combination of the difficult experience of the Holocaust and my immersion in Holocaust studies raised an inevitable question: Why did the positive values that serve as a guiding light for Judaism, the moral message of the Bible—why did they arouse hatred from outside? Why were my parents murdered, why was I persecuted, why was the terrible suffering in the camps decreed upon me?”

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When Kristallnacht came, November 9, 1938, everything changed.

— HERBERT KARLINER



Herbert Karliner



PEISKRETSCHAM, GERMANY

Born on September 3, 1926. (Died in 2020.)
His family ran a store. He was 12 years old during the events of Kristallnacht.

Herbert describes the moment when his familiar world was turned upside down: “When Kristallnacht came, November 9, 1938, everything changed

His father went out to the store. Suddenly they heard him shouting. The family members went downstairs and saw that the store had been completely looted: “Everything was turned upside down.”

Then a man arrived and told them that the synagogue was burning. The father ran to the synagogue and tried to save the Torah scrolls, but he was beaten by a German soldier from the S.A. Afterward, the Gestapo (the secret state police of Nazi Germany) took the father, Josef, together with other Jewish men from the town, to Buchenwald concentration camp.

About three weeks later, the father returned. Herbert said: “When he came back, I could not recognize him.”

The father told his children almost nothing about what he had gone through in the camp. Following Kristallnacht, the family understood that they had to leave Germany. In May 1939, the family boarded a ship called the St. Louis in an attempt to reach Cuba. The ship was rejected and forced to return to Europe.

Herbert and his brother Walter reached France and managed to survive, among other things by living under false identities; his parents and two sisters were murdered in the Holocaust. Herbert immigrated to the United States in 1946 and started a family there.

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Herbert Karliner, who survived Kristallnacht. Courtesy of Herbert Karliner

Before his father was murdered in Auschwitz, Karliner said that his father told him he had purchased a life insurance policy from Allianz. He said that he and his brother tried to collect on the policy after the war, but Allianz claimed that it had been paid in 1938 to an “unknown person.” Later they claimed that the payment had been transferred to Karliner himself. But documents were later discovered showing that the date of the alleged payment was November 9, 1938—Kristallnacht.

In the years after the war, Karliner, a retired baker, devoted his time to Holocaust education and spent Saturdays as a guide at the Holocaust Memorial of the Greater Miami Jewish Federation. Karliner was survived by his wife of nearly 60 years, Vera, his daughter and son-in-law, and their three grandchildren.

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They broke in in the middle of the night and arrested all the boys, maybe fifty boys.”

— JACOB WIENER



Jacob Wiener

(GERD ZWINICKI)



WÜRZBURG AND BREMEN,
GERMANY

Born on March 25, 1917, in Bremen. (Died in 2011.) In November 1938, at the time of Kristallnacht, he was 21 years old and studied at the Jewish Teachers' Seminary in Würzburg, about 400 km from his family home. On November 9, at around 2:30 at night, men of the regime broke into the students' dormitory.

“They broke in in the middle of the night and arrested all the boys, maybe fifty boys.”

The students were taken downstairs and ordered to line up in groups of five. Jacob was arrested and imprisoned in Würzburg. The arrested students marched through the streets of the city while local residents cursed and spat at them, passed burning synagogues, and were imprisoned for seven days. Many of those arrested were sent to concentration camps during those days.

After he was released, he made his way back to Bremen, his hometown. He had no money, and the seminary secretary gave him 20 marks for the train.

When he reached his hometown, he called home and no one answered. He went to the family bicycle shop and found its windows shattered and the entrance blocked. A non-Jewish neighbor told him what had happened on Kristallnacht: the rioters had broken into the house. His father had managed to escape through the roof. They asked his mother where her husband was. Jacob recounted: “She did not want to say... and so they killed her.”

His brother was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp. Thus, for Wiener, Kristallnacht was not only the burning of synagogues and the smashing of windows: he came home and discovered that his mother had been murdered.

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In 1939, Gerd negotiated with the Gestapo (the German secret police) and established a school for Jewish children. His father had family in Canada who managed to obtain documents that enabled the family to leave Germany. Gerd, his father, and his three brothers left Germany on May 31, 1939, and immigrated to Canada via Great Britain.

Later, Jacob immigrated to the United States on a student visa to study at the Rabbinical College of Baltimore. In 1944 he was ordained as a rabbi and received a position at the Hebrew National Orphan Home in Yonkers, New York. He changed his name to Rabbi Jacob Wiener.

Rabbi Wiener received a doctorate in human development and social relations from New York University and became a social worker in New York City's Department of Human Resources Administration. In 1948 he married Trudel Farentrog, who was a Holocaust survivor. She survived the Holocaust by being sent on a Kindertransport train to England. They started a family.