

Margot Karp, née Bernheimer's memories of the 'Kristallnacht'

Yes, I can still remember the 'Kristallnacht' very clearly: I was almost 14 years old - and the only one of the Bernheimer daughters who was still in Göppingen [Beate and Anneliese went to the USA in the summer of 1938 to live with strangers; I should have followed them the next year if it had become impossible for me to continue attending school]. And we knew that Eugen (Eugen Bernheimer, Margot's father - KMR) had been arrested more or less by mistake; we were later told that only men between the ages of 16 and 60 were to be taken into 'protective custody'. He had turned 60 on October 9th!

During the day we received several phone calls warning us that some action was to take place later in the day. I can't remember who called us, but it seems that 'the indignation of the Germans about an event in Paris' was expressed elsewhere during the night before and earlier in the day.

In the Bernheimer house [which had been in the family since the mid-1800s] at Geislinger Straße 3, there was a brandy distillery on the first floor, a store facing Geislinger Straße, our family's apartment on the second floor, and several smaller apartments on the second and third floors.

The store was closed during the afternoon; the wooden shutters on the distillery and the warehouse were closed, and the metal shutters in front of the display window and the entrance door to the store were pulled down. Upstairs, the windows and wooden shutters were closed and then we waited.

I don't know when the outraged citizens came to our house. We kept the lights completely dark and looked out through the gaps in the shutters. We heard noise and singing, and then the doors and shutters were hit with hard objects. Finally, the shutters on the first floor were smashed - and we heard a lot of glass being broken - [there were many bottles of liqueur in the exhibition window]. Then we

heard several shots aimed at the second floor [the windows in the living room were broken as a result]; but no one came upstairs at this time, and we perhaps assumed that it was all over and that the crowd had moved on to their next destination.

We waited. Soon in the evening the downstairs door was forced open and two or three men came upstairs [I can still picture them in their civilian clothes - but my memory may not be correct]. They asked my father [!] to come to the police station - not to pack anything and bring it with him - and to come very quickly. He did that. My mother, her sister Eugenie, who was visiting us from Berlin, and I were in a state of shock. Eventually I fell asleep...

The next day we received several phone calls - only very short conversations, as we were convinced that the calls were tapped; but we learned that the synagogue had been burned down and that the men had been arrested. I can't quite remember whether it was that day or the next that we heard that the men had been taken to the castle - and that the women and girls were going there to find out where their husbands were. I went with my mother - we took other women with us on the way - and I remember it was a big group waiting for information. I don't know where the men actually were at that time [the data you gave me about my father's stay in Dachau indicates that he may still have been in Göppingen], but we didn't find out that they had been 'interned' in Dachau - no, we couldn't send them anything, we couldn't get in touch with them, it would be for their own 'protection.

The next few weeks were very difficult; orders forbidding valuable items to be taken, 'blocked accounts', no news of the missing men - not knowing where to shop. We contacted the American consulate in Stuttgart for news [affidavits vouching for our support in the United States had been filed long before]. And then some of the men came back - and my father was one of the ones who came back early. He never told us what actually happened; I can only remember a

report about the night [and not only then], during which they had to stand in the cold all night long - and how you were punished if you fell down - and how one of our 'Göppinger' fell and never got up again. (The tradition is not correct here, because none of those deported from GP to Dachau died there. - KMR)

We were incredibly lucky that we were promised visas that enabled us to leave in May 1939; we had to sell the store and house to a loyal party supporter; we were allowed to send furniture and clothes, but nothing of value, and we could only take 10 marks each. We stayed there long enough to receive our identification cards with the names Sarah and Israel added; I still have mine.