

KRISTALLNACHT

On November 3, 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, a young Polish Jew living in Paris, received a post-card from his sister Berta informing him that his family had been deported from Hanover to a Polish camp at Zbonszyn.

Dear Herschel,

You must have heard about the disaster. I shall tell you what has happened. On Thursday evening, rumors were circulating that Polish Jews in our city were being expelled. None of us believed it. At nine o'clock that evening a policeman came to our house to tell us to report to the police station with our passports. We all trooped off as we were to the police station. Practically the whole neighbourhood was already there. Almost immediately we were taken to the town hall in a police car; so was everyone else. No one told us what was up, but we realized that this was going to be the end. They shoved an expulsion order into our hands, saying we had to leave Germany before October 29. We were not allowed to go home. I pleaded to be allowed to fetch a few things and a policeman accompanied me. I packed a case with the most important clothes, but that we all we could salvage. We haven't a penny. Could you send us something at Lodz? Love from all of use.

THE GRYSZPAN FAMILY

Herschel Grysszpan's father, Sendel Siegmung Grynszpan, was born at Radomsk at a time when Poland was part of Russia. His mother, Rifka Silberberg, came from the same region. In April 1911, a year after they married, the Grynszpans fled Polish Russia for fear that a tide of pogroms would sweep across the Ukrainian border into Poland. They settled in Hanover, retaining Russian nationality until the end of the First World War. When the Versailles Treaty restored territorial sovereignty to Poland, Sendel Grynszpan opted for Polish nationality.

The Grynszpans had eight children. The first was stillborn on November 11, 1912. The second was born on April 27, 1914 and died of scarlet fever in 1928. A third son was killed in a road accident. A daughter, Ester Beile (Berta), was born on January 31, 1916, and another son, Marcus, on August 18, 1919. The sixth, and the last to survive, was Herschel Feibel, born March 28, 1921 in his parents' home at 36 Burgstrasse, Hanover.

The Grynszpans lived on the meager income yielded by tailors' shop in an old quarter of Hanover. For twenty years Sendel Grynszpan struggled to make ends meet while his family was decimated by illness and misfortune. The devastating effects of the economic slump in 1929 forced him to give up his shop. During this interval he traded in second-hand goods. His earnings were so small that he received welfare assistance. He was able to return to tailoring just as Adolf Hitler rose to power. Despite Nazi Government, his family subsisted more or less adequately until 1938.

TESTIMONY OF SENDEL SIEGMUND GRYNSZPAN

Then, on the night of October 28-29, the German government deported the fifteen thousand Polish Jews who would have been made stateless by the law, which the Polish government had passed on March 31, and supplemented by the order of October 6. With Grynszpan, 484 persons were arrested in Hanover and deported to Poland.

‘We were not offered an explanation,’ Sendel Grynszpan related.

It was a Thursday, October 27, 1938. A policeman knocked on our door and told us to report to the police station with our passports. He said, ‘Don’t bother to take anything else, you’ll be right back.’ When we reached the police station, my wife, my daughter, my son Marcus and myself, we saw a number of people sitting or standing. Some were weeping. The police inspector was shouting at the top of his voice, ‘Sign here. You are being deported.’ I had to sign like everyone else. We were taken to the concert hall beside the Leine, where about 600 people had been assembled from various parts of Hanover. We were kept there for about 24 hours until Friday night, when police vans took us, about twenty at a time, to the station. The streets of Hanover teemed with people shouting, ‘Send the Jews to Palestine’.

We were taken by train to the German border station at Neu Bentschen on the line connecting Frankfurt an Oder with Posen. We arrived at about 6 o’clock on Saturday morning. There were trains from all over Germany: Leipzig, Berlin, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Beilefeld, Essen, Bremen. We were about 12,000 in all. That was Saturday, October 29. When we got to the border we were searched. We were only allowed to take 10 marks; any excess was confiscated. That was German law, we were told: ‘You didn’t have more than that when you arrived in Germany and you can’t take any more away with you now.’ We were kept under guard and not allowed to communicate with anyone. The SS told us we would have to walk about 2 kilometres to the border. The people who couldn’t walk were beaten until the road was wet with their blood. Their baggage was taken away. We were dealt with cruelly and barbarously. It was the first time that I realized how barbaric the German really are. They made us run while they shouted ‘Run! Run!’ I was struck down at the roadside, but my Marcus took me by the hand and said, ‘Come on, Papa; they’ll kill you if you don’t.’

Finally we reached the border. We crossed it. The women were first because they began firing at us. The Poles had no idea why we were there or why there were so many of us. A Polish general and some officers came to examine our papers. They saw that we were all Polish citizens—we had special passports and they decided to let us into Poland.

We were taken to a tiny village of 6,000 inhabitants, although there were 12,000 of us. It was raining hard. There were a number of old people among us, some of whom fell or fainted; others had heart attacks. Although we hadn’t eaten since Thursday evening and were very hungry, we did not want to eat the German

bread. We were taken to the stables of a military camp, as there was no room anywhere else. We didn't write immediately because we were too hungry. On Sunday a truck came from Poznan and we all rushed round it. They threw bread and those who managed to catch any had bread, but it turned out that there was enough bread for all of us. Then I wrote a letter to my son Herschel in Paris. It told him not to write to us in Germany but to Poland.

Thalman, pp. 35-36

REICH EMBASSY AIDE IN PARIS SHOT TO AVENGE EXPULSIONS BY THE NAZIS

17-Year Old Polish Jew Fires Five Shots at Third Secretary, Two
Taking Effect—Youth Tried to Reach Ambassador

PARIS. Nov. 7—Seeking to avenge his “fellow-Jewish sufferers from Nazi persecution and oppression.” 17-year old Herschel Grynspan , a German-born Polish émigré of Jewish extraction, today shot and seriously wounded Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the German Embassy.

The shooting took place at 9:30 o'clock this morning in Herr vom Rath's private office on the second floor of the embassy building on the Rue de Lille, near the Chamber of Deputies. A preliminary inquiry established that it was just a chance that the Ambassador himself. Count Johannes von Welczeck escaped because Grynspan declared he was out to kill all in the German Embassy in retaliation for the “Polish Jews just expelled from Germany.”

He added that he was satisfied and “lucky to get one German anyway, although a bit removed from the top.”