

Chapter Four: Daily Life in the Private Domain, 1933–1938

Jewish Family Life and Social Life

Prior to 1933 the acculturated Jewish Germans of Magdeburg led full and rich family and social lives. They benefited from the wide array of activities offered both by their community and the city. Between 1933 and September 1935 they attempted to maintain what had been normal family and social lives, constantly encountering exclusion and defamation. As a result of these policies, community members gravitated increasingly to their own cultural institutions. The majority of these were still operational until May 1935. This led to a distinctive increase in awareness and interest in the various expressions of Jewishness. Jewish homes and institutions became havens of refuge from the reality of the worsening situation in the outside world and Jewish identities, particularly those of the young, were fostered or renewed. From May 1935 the dissolution of the community's institutions gathered momentum and by the time of the pogrom of November 1938, the only bodies operational were those providing religious and welfare services. Social networks became almost exclusively Jewish and the fulcrum of the community became the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*. Life continued and Jews attempted to maintain full and dignified social lives within their invisible ghetto. In this respect, the home and the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* became cherished spaces. They were the only safe spaces still in existence on the eve of the November pogrom.

Both family and social life suffered from the effects of all antisemitic measures that occurred between 1933 and May 1935, but Jews attempted to adjust and continue to live as normally as possible. Given the encroaching hostility of the

outside world, the home became an especially important private space. Most families affiliated with the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* consisted of two parents, with one or two children. Families possessing more than this number of children were considered large and were in the minority.¹

The only real recorded direct impact of antisemitic policy entering into this domain in the practical sense prior to November 1938 was when the Nuremberg Laws forbade Jews from employing female ‘Aryan’ domestic staff under the age of forty-five years. When this occurred, it shocked the community. On 30 April 1936, this law was extended to ‘Aryans’ who held foreign citizenship.² The only exceptions to this ruling were ‘Aryan’ females employed in Jewish households, where the Jewish males resident were infirm and not deemed a danger.³

The antisemitic measures in all domains beyond the confines of the home placed much pressure on family and social life and subsequently had the potential to also invade home life. Older Jews made every attempt to shield the younger members of the community from what was occurring.⁴ This practice was not always successful. The young teenager Sigrid Schetzer recalled when her paternal uncle was arrested in 1938 for a minor offence:

Uncle Hermann was sent in 1938 to Dachau. The Gestapo made a law or something. Anybody who had a police fine or anything at all like that would be taken to a concentration camp. So, when I came home [on] Saturday night from ping pong at the synagogue, and you know children, they hear all sorts of things. And I came home and I said: “Do you know what we heard?” So, my uncle said: “*Ach!* [Oh!], nothing will happen to me, because I’ve got

¹ Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

² Betr.: Beschäftigung deutschblütiger Hausgehilfinnen fremder Staatsangehörigkeit in jüdischen Haushalten, 30. April 1936, Bestand Rep. C 31, Signatur Nr. 26, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 123.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For a general discussion on the disruption of Jewish family life in Nazi Germany see Trude Maurer, “From Everyday Life to State of Emergency: Jews in Weimar and Nazi Germany,” in Marion Kaplan, ed., op. cit., pp. 271–373.

the Iron Cross!” The next day he was taken to Dachau, and he was there for six months. He came back a broken man. But they had an affidavit and could have gone to America. They wouldn’t go, and when they saw us off at the station, he said: “You’re crazy!”⁵

When he told my parents of his experiences in Dachau my father said: “What you are telling us is impossible! It’s hard to believe.”⁶

Outside the home, Jews gravitated to the community’s long-established and much-valued institutions, including the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*. For the period from 1933 until May 1935, community members continued all of their Jewish affiliations.⁷ Whilst the interviewees were all involved in Jewish youth groups, their adult counterparts maintained strong links with the particular institutions which had been longstanding components of their communal and social lives. Gerry Levy remembered that his father had held the position of treasurer of the *Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, Ortsgruppe Magdeburg*.⁸ All interviewees confirmed that their fathers and/or male relations who were war veterans were committed members.⁹ The remaining predominant affiliations recalled by interviewees were those with the *B’nai B’rith Mendelssohn-Loge XII 357*, its female wing the *Frauenbund der Mendelssohn-Loge*¹⁰ and for a limited few *Makkabi*.¹¹ One interviewee described his father’s involvement with the latter organisation, recalling both the athletics and handball teams.¹² From May 1935 these institutions were all dissolved and, as a direct result, the role and activities of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* expanded.

⁵ S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

⁶ Personal interview with Sigrid Freeman (recorded), Sydney, 3 June 1998.

⁷ The roles and eventual dissolutions of these institutions which chart the full period between 1933 and 1938 have been discussed in Chapter One.

⁸ Levy, op. cit., 4 August 1997.

⁹ Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

¹⁰ Levy, op. cit., 10 July 1997.

¹¹ Name withheld, op. cit., 18 June 1999.

¹² Ibid.

The *Synagogen-Gemeinde* continued its religious functions, but also operated increasingly as a social centre for Jews.¹³ Religious celebrations were combined into social events and leisure activities were also provided for the youth within the safe walls of the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*.¹⁴ Gerry Levy recalled how the celebration of his *Bar Mitzvah* on 1 May 1937 was such an event, both religious and social in essence.¹⁵

Until November 1938, community members still felt relatively safe within the confines of their homes and the *Synagogen-Gemeinde*. In contra-distinction to this, there was no such sanctuary in the public domain in the city centre, where the majority of Jews lived. Jews developed strategies to meet socially in public, for example, at the Jewish cemetery and leased garden allotments. Jews also attempted to find respite from public degradation by travelling to other places.

The sports ground adjacent to the Jewish cemetery was actually a vacant field, which the community had purchased for the cemetery's eventual expansion. It had been turned into a football field and had always been used by the community for recreational events.¹⁶ After 1933 and particularly after September 1935, the field was used as a social centre for Jews. As the cemetery was located outside the city centre in the suburb of Sudenburg, it also offered relative safety. This field provided the only outdoor space where Jews as a large group could socialise with relative safety and was still being utilised for this purpose during World War

¹³ For a general discussion on social ostracism and the intensification of social life among Jews see Maurer, "From Everyday Life to State of Emergency: Jews in Weimar and Nazi Germany," in Kaplan, ed., op. cit., pp. 336–342.

¹⁴ S. Freeman, op. cit., 3 June 1998.

¹⁵ Levy, op. cit., 10 July 1997.

¹⁶ H. Freeman, op. cit., 3 June 1998.

Two.¹⁷ The only other opportunity that Jews availed themselves of was the possibility of leasing garden allotments, as the following recollection indicates:

We hired such a garden so that we could be together; but a lot of Jewish families had gardens there; so we visited each other. But my parents and Ruth's parents hired this garden together, and then the whole family came to visit us.¹⁸

By the middle of 1935 Jews were resorting to such measures, and the oft-repeated comment of interviewees was that their social sphere only consisted of Jews. This practice was also definitely used as a coping mechanism against the brutal reality of what they encountered in the public domain, as one interviewee remarked:

That was my life there. I mean we lived within the Jewish community. We only had our Jewish friends.¹⁹

Gerry Levy articulated the essence of the situation when he remarked: 'There was a separation from the rest of the world.'²⁰

Even when Jews organised events for themselves outside the known Jewish institutions for social purposes, the regulated separation and Nazi concern for public safety always followed. Such an instance occurred not long after the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws in December 1935²¹ and concerned Jews organising dances in Magdeburg. The concern arose when 'Aryans' were noted to be frequenting such events. As a result, in consort with the Gestapa and the *Reich* Chamber of Culture, the office of the State Police for the Merseburg District issued a memorandum indicating that only such events which could guarantee a 'Jews only' clientele would henceforth be granted permission to operate.²²

¹⁷ Name withheld, op. cit., 18 June 1999.

¹⁸ H. B., op. cit., 15 August 1997.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Levy, op. cit., 4 August 1997.

²¹ Betrifft: Jüdische Tanzveranstaltungen, 10. Dezember 1935, Collection JM, File 10624, YVA, op. cit., p. 100.

²² Ibid.

All interviewees recalled holidaying with their families before 1933 and how some holidays continued into the early years of the Nazi regime. They particularly recalled that after September 1935 visits to relations in other parts of Germany were undertaken not just to visit family but also as a temporary respite from the situation in Magdeburg. The Harz Mountains, the Thuringia Forest and the Baltic Sea coast were popular holiday destinations. Gisela Kent recalled family holidays to both the Harz and to Thuringia.²³ Gerry Levy also recalled his holidays in the Harz. He noted that in spite of not being known in a different place, this did not always guarantee protection from antisemitism. He recalled one of his family's holidays:

We normally went to the Harz as a family at least twice per year, occasionally once per year. We never had any incidents of antisemitism there, with one exception. This particular place had anti-Jewish signs, which were larger and more prominent than usual. In Magdeburg the signs were generally small and made of metal. But in Bad Harzburg the signs were large and the text was in red: '*Juden ist hier Zutritt verboten.*' We went there not knowing this. So we never went back there.²⁴

The Baltic Sea coast was equally popular. The Herrmann family holidayed every summer at Heringsdorf, near Wollin on the Pomeranian Bay. The Herrmanns' daughter fondly recalled the local delicacies of smoked eels.²⁵ The Jeruchem family also holidayed in coastal towns. Hans Jensen recalled holidaying in Swinemünde, near Stettin²⁶ and in the spa towns of Kranz, Rauschen and Zoppot, all in the vicinity of Königsberg.²⁷ Sigrid Freeman recalled being sent to the North Sea coast for a short holiday with a girlfriend after the death of her only sister, Brigitte, on 24 February 1936:

²³ Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

²⁴ Levy, op. cit., 4 August 1997.

²⁵ Personal interview with I. Poppert (recorded), Sydney, 16 January 1998.

²⁶ Jensen, op. cit., 14 June 1999.

²⁷ Jensen, op. cit., 11 July 1999.

I went once to Wyk auf Föhr [Wyk on the Isle of Föhr]. On Wyk auf Föhr was a Jewish girls' *Pensionat* [Boarding School]. I went with a girlfriend, Eva Riese. That was the only time I went on my own [on a holiday]. Wyk auf Föhr – it's a little island, absolutely beautiful!²⁸

At the beginning of 1936 Jews were still travelling. However, they were no longer taking holidays as such, but lodged with relatives. Interviewees recalled such stays in Berlin, Hamburg, Königsberg and other parts of East Prussia. A number also witnessed the Olympic Games in Berlin. Sigrid Freeman recalled a trip her family undertook:

I visited East Prussia only once in 1936. My sister had died in 1936, and we wanted to go on a little bit of a holiday; so we went when the Olympic Games were on, via Berlin, to East Prussia to a town called Ortelsburg. My uncle's parents still lived there and we visited them. And we stayed with them for about three or four weeks.²⁹

Hans Jensen also remembered attending one event of the Olympic Games.³⁰ Those in Magdeburg who were too young to personally experience the Olympic Games, also followed them with keen interest, as recounted in the following episode:

We had a great time with the Olympic Games. I was only four years old, but Dad being a sportsperson was extremely excited about the Olympic Games. And we were out collecting cigarette coupons which we then could exchange for official photos. We had these two thick books of Olympic photos. Yes, that was a really good time.³¹

His older brother, who was five years old at the time, concurred, indicating quite clearly how this was an important family event in their already difficult lives.³²

Yet, even the desired anonymity that accompanied most trips also possessed the potential to expose Jews to unknown dangers, as the teenager Inge-Ruth Herrmann discovered when she was in Berlin, where she stayed with her maternal grandmother, Jenny Manneberg, and her spinster aunt, Käthe Manneberg, both of

²⁸ S. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

²⁹ S. Freeman, op. cit., 3 June 1998.

³⁰ Jensen, op. cit., 14 June 1999.

³¹ Name withheld, op. cit., 18 June 1999.

³² M. F., op. cit., 27 June 1999.

whom lived together in Charlottenburg. She recalled her terror of being caught alone in a crowd in busy Berlin:

I was walking along the *Kurfürstendamm*, and suddenly everybody stopped, saying: “Hitler is coming! Hitler is coming!” And everybody rushed to the front and Hitler, Göring and Goebbels, every one of them came. As the car passed, I was right in the back. And somebody said: “Oh, that poor little girl, she can’t see anything in the back.” And they got me right in the front, and I stood between two SS men. And of course, everybody went: “*Heil!*” And I just stood there. If I don’t put my hand up, I’m in trouble, so I put my hand up and was going: “Huh! Huh! Huh!” [motioning to cough], as though I couldn’t say anything. I [will] never forget this. I was terrified. I just got caught in the whole crowd: “That little girl; she won’t see our *Führer*. We have to put her at the front.” I was in the front line. I got a beautiful view.³³

I was terrified, absolutely terrified. And when I came back and told my grandmother, she nearly had kittens!³⁴

The teenager was never to see her Berlin relatives again. Both her grandmother and aunt were deported to Theresienstadt on her grandmother’s eighty-third birthday on 26 June 1942. After spending more than two years in Theresienstadt, both women were transported to Auschwitz on 28 October 1944, where they perished.³⁵ Two female relatives of the Mannebergs, a mother and her adult daughter, lived in the same building as the Mannebergs. When called for deportation, they gassed themselves in their apartment.³⁶

Another example is noteworthy as, other than recounting the respite that Gerry Levy was to enjoy by a trip to Westphalia in 1937, it also highlighted some of the internal prejudices extant in German society. Gerry Levy recalled his holiday in Nieheim:

During the long summer holiday I went with a group of friends to Nieheim in Westphalia for a holiday. A Jewish lady there had a type of country store, and

³³ Poppert, op. cit., 9 January 1998.

³⁴ Poppert, op. cit., 16 January 1998.

³⁵ Institut Theresienstädter Initiative, ed., *Theresienstädter Gedenkbuch: Die Opfer der Judentransporte aus Deutschland nach Theresienstadt 1942–1945* Prag und Berlin: Verlag Academia und Metropol Verlag, 2000, p. 142.

³⁶ Poppert, op. cit., 9 January 1998.

in order to make some extra money she took in children at holiday time. We had a fantastic time. In this village there was a Jewish farmer, there were Jewish storekeepers, there was a Jewish department store; there was quite a considerable Jewish community; also a beautiful little synagogue.

All the non-Jews in the village were Catholics. In Magdeburg, and in central Germany as a whole, the majority religion was Lutheranism, and the Catholics, like the Jews were a minority. Anyway, the attitude in Nieheim was quite different. We were readily accepted because, thanks G-d, we weren't Lutherans! The kids in our age played with us. We played war, we bashed each other up; it wasn't because we were Jewish. We came from central Germany and were simply regarded as different. It was really a revelation. I went back there a couple of times and then finally one last time before we left Germany at the end of December [1938].

The time in Westphalia was so different and so free, in contra-distinction to the tension that we experienced in our normal environment. We three boys slept in the one room during our visit there; and very early in the morning some boys outside starting throwing stones at the windows. We were strangers, not Jews, so they wanted to test us out. We got on all right afterwards. I believe the main thing they wanted to establish was that the visiting boys were not Lutherans!³⁷

Such temporary respites for Jews became a valued safety valve and assisted them, possibly even fortified them, on return to their home city, where they were known and could not escape all forms of both official and unofficial antisemitism.

Life for Jews within the confines of the home provided some sense of sanctuary. Prior to the pogrom of November 1938, Jewish identities were fostered or renewed within Jewish space. Jews had no option other than to gravitate to all things Jewish, particularly after September 1935, when they were officially cast out of the '*Volksgemeinschaft*.' With public ostracism, family life became even more important, although the impact of antisemitism always had the potential to enter the domain of the home. The home may have been a physical sanctuary, but it was not a psychological one. The stress and strain of the reality of the hostile outside world impacted on family and social life.

³⁷ Levy, op. cit., 4 August 1997.

Until May 1935, Jews could still find solace in their communal institutions. Owing to the dissolution of these institutions from this point on up until November 1938, the *Synagogen-Gemeinde* filled the void created and attempted to meet both the religious and social needs of community members. Whilst more than one third of the community had left the city by the time of the pogrom of November 1938, the remainder of the community waited and considered their options, including emigration. Jews were left in utter shock and even further disbelief from the violent and wanton destruction of the remaining bastions of safety on the *Reichskristallnacht*, as their homes, businesses and synagogues were violated and lives shattered forever.

The Emigration Quandary

By June 1937 more than one third of the Jewish population of Magdeburg had relocated or emigrated. Statistics for the Jewish population for the city indicate that in June 1933³⁸ the city counted 1,973 Jews. By June 1937 the figure had reduced to 1,256,³⁹ indicating that 717 Jews had left Magdeburg, accounting for approximately 36% of the original population. Those who remained attempted to navigate their difficult lives under increasingly hostile circumstances. The subject of emigration was one that featured widely in all Jewish households and within the community itself. Those adults and families who had left Germany by the time of the *Reichskristallnacht* had either much foresight or, in the majority of cases,

³⁸ Statistisches Reichsamt, *Statistik des Deutschen Reichs, Band 451, Volkszählung: die Bevölkerung des Deutschen Reichs nach den Ergebnissen der Volkszählung 1933, Heft 5, Die Glaubensjuden im Deutschen Reich*, Bestand R 3102, BAB, op. cit., pp. 15–33.

³⁹ Mitgliederzahl der Synagogen-Gemeinde zu Magdeburg, Stichtag 1937, Collection D/Ma3, File VIII.8, CAHJP, op. cit.

were forced to, owing to their impoverishment which had resulted from unemployment. Youth in the community prepared themselves for unaccompanied emigration, intending to be re-united with family members at a later stage. A majority of the younger generation, having only known Nazism for much of their lives, did not feel the same sense of nostalgia for a German homeland as the older generation still felt in 1938.

For the majority of the Jewish adult generation there were more reasons to stay than to leave. Legal restrictions on what could be taken out of Germany created a financial dilemma. This was coupled with affection for family members and rootedness in their country. In the case of the elderly, they generally did not wish to leave. There still existed the hope that things would improve. Their essential Germanness made it difficult for them to consider adapting to foreign lands, particularly Palestine and countries in the New World. They also had to grapple with the realisation that their choices in destinations willing to accept them were extremely limited. When the *Reichskristallnacht* took place, the majority of community members were at this stage of their lives. In the wake of the pogrom, few saw emigration as a quandary, but rather as a means of survival.

The majority of Magdeburg's Jews were self-employed business people. As Barkai has stated, between 1934 and 1937 many Jews still had property and assets and these could serve as a source for financing emigration. However, they were also pivotal factors in inducing Jews to remain in Germany.⁴⁰ This was particularly so for the middle classes, and the longer they postponed their departure, the more assets they lost.

⁴⁰ Barkai, op. cit., p. 99.

The *Reichsfluchtsteuer* enabled the Nazi government to ‘legally’ plunder the assets of emigrating Jews. The tax was applicable to assets totalling more than RM 200,000. However, this figure was reduced to RM 50,000 in 1934. This burden was compounded by currency regulations. Emigrants could not transfer their money abroad even after the payment of the tax, as their capital had to be deposited into special blocked accounts in German currency. Sale of German currency from such blocked accounts for foreign currency entailed a considerable loss, due to the set exchange rate, which, after initially being set at half the official rate in 1935 only continued to spiral downwards. The value of the blocked-account *Reichsmark* for emigration to countries other than Palestine had plummeted by September 1939 to a value of only 4% of the official exchange rate. This was equivalent to a devaluation of approximately 96%.⁴¹

Emigration to Palestine constituted the exception. The *Haavara* Agreement signed in 1933 made it easier to transfer capital to Palestine.⁴² There was a higher exchange rate than the usual one for the *Reichsmark*, which in this case also had to be deposited into a special blocked account. Over the course of years this rate also worsened significantly. However, the devaluation of the *Haavara* blocked-account *Reichsmark* was comparatively lower and only ever approximately 70% at its lowest point.⁴³

Added to this were a plethora of bureaucratic processes designed to strip Jews of assets, whilst simultaneously placing a greater burden on the process of

⁴¹ Barkai, op. cit., p. 101.

⁴² Yfaat Weiss, “The Transfer Agreement and The Boycott Movement: A Jewish Dilemma on the Eve of the Holocaust,” *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. XXVI, 1998, pp. 129–171 and David Bankier, “German Interests in the Haavara-Transfer Agreement 1933–1939,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XXXV, 1990, pp. 245–266.

⁴³ Barkai, op. cit., p. 101.

emigration.⁴⁴ Jews in Magdeburg experienced this for the entire period and on the eve of the *Reichskristallnacht* the majority were still waiting and hoping for the long-desired change, which never came.

The subject of emigration (and ordinances concerning Jewish emigration) prior to September 1935 did not feature significantly in Magdeburg.⁴⁵ However, after the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws, and even more so from the beginning of 1938 until the pogrom, measures against Jewish emigrants in the city gradually gained more prominence.

On 2 August 1935, the State Police for the Magdeburg District issued a directive that Jews who had already emigrated but desired to return for any reason, were to be refused.⁴⁶ In October 1935 a memorandum was despatched to all offices in the province reminding them of the financial obligations of emigrating Jews. The office also issued a reminder that this was to be policed and alerted staff to the ‘illegal smuggling of goods by Jewish emigrants.’⁴⁷ Further to this concern over ‘smuggling,’ on 30 July 1936, the Gestapa in Magdeburg issued a memorandum alerting all offices to ‘the practice of the smuggling of gold and

⁴⁴ Both the subject of Nazi policies on Jewish emigration and the Jewish responses to them are comprehensively discussed in Herbert A. Strauss, “Jewish Emigration from Germany – Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (I),” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XXV, 1980, pp. 313–358 and Herbert A. Strauss, “Jewish Emigration from Germany – Nazi Policies and Jewish Responses (II),” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, vol. XXVI, 1981, pp. 343–404.

⁴⁵ This pattern conforms to all of the previously discussed subjects during what may be termed as the period of transition from 1933 until the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws.

⁴⁶ Rundschreiben Nr. 288; Betrifft: Maßnahmen gegen zurückkehrende Emigranten, 2. August 1935, Bestand Rep. C 31, Signatur Nr. 26, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁷ Betrifft: Ausreise von steuerpflichtigen, insbesondere nichtarische Personen, 29. Oktober 1935, Collection JM, File 10624, YVA, op. cit., p. 89.

other fine metals by Jews emigrating.’⁴⁸ The issue of returning emigrants featured repeatedly. On 5 January 1938, the Gestapa acknowledged receipt of a memorandum from Berlin which had been despatched nationally, reinforcing the message that ‘the return of Jewish emigrants into the territories of the *Reich* was fundamentally undesirable.’⁴⁹

The incidence of this directive appearing repeatedly is of interest, as it is known that in the case of Magdeburg that a number of Jews did not emigrate, but rather made repeated investigatory trips abroad to such destinations as Palestine and the United States of America (USA) with the view to emigration. Whilst the memorandum only concerns returning emigrants, it may also indicate the bureaucratic level of frustration of the Nazi administration with Jews leaving and then returning. From the viewpoint of the Nazis, such trips went counter to their desired outcome of permanent Jewish emigration.

Hemmi Freeman’s three siblings settled in Palestine in 1933. He recalled his parents’ attitude to the idea of emigration:

My parents went to Palestine to visit my brothers in 1936. They came back and said: “No way!” They didn’t want to live there. My mother went on her own to America to see her sisters and came back and they stayed. My parents were still in Magdeburg until the very last moment before war broke out. They went to Palestine in August 1939. In fact, they rang me up in London, and said: “We’ve just got the papers for Palestine. Should we go?” And I said: “For goodness sake, go!” And they did. But, it was not easy parting [with Germany]. I mean they were retired; they lived off investments. And yet they had no reason to stay in the country – the four of us [children] were gone; but they still didn’t leave the country. They saw Palestine, which they both didn’t fancy and my mother saw America, which she didn’t fancy. Magdeburg was still a small paradise in their eyes.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Rundschreiben Nr. 384/36; Betr.: Goldausfuhr durch Juden – Handel mit Goldwaren, 30. Juli 1936, Bestand Rep. C 31, Signatur Nr. 26, LHASA MD, op. cit., pp. 221–222.

⁴⁹ Betrifft: Rückkehr von Emigranten in das Reichsgebiet, 5. Januar 1938, Collection JM, File 10624, YVA, op. cit., p. 190.

⁵⁰ H. Freeman, op. cit., 13 May 1998.

This practice of investigation before emigration was also undertaken by the father of another interviewee, who recalled his father travelling to Palestine in 1936. He returned to Germany and the family did not emigrate.⁵¹ When World War Two commenced the family had already made its preparations for immigration to Australia. With the outbreak of war, they missed their ship from Hamburg and were trapped in Germany. They survived the war years in Magdeburg and eventually arrived in Australia in 1947.⁵² There is also evidence to suggest that emigrants returned to Magdeburg to visit family.

From 30 August 1938, Jews were excluded completely from the travel industry and Jews were henceforth forced to book their passages through ‘Aryan’ travel agents.⁵³ This no doubt allowed close monitoring of all emigration practices. The local Nazi authorities also recorded emigration statistics for each six-month period, which were then forwarded on to Berlin. On 17 September 1938, the emigration statistics for the Magdeburg district for the period from 1 January 1938 – 30 June 1938 were despatched to the *Reich* Minister for Trade and Commerce.⁵⁴ The report included five individuals from the city of Magdeburg and a further twenty-two from the administrative district of Magdeburg.⁵⁵

Of all the interviewees only one family group emigrated as one unit prior to the *Reichskristallnacht*. The Röhricht family left Magdeburg in February 1937.⁵⁶

A further two families had every intention to emigrate. However, owing to a

⁵¹ Name withheld, op. cit., 18 June 1999.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Betrifft: Juden im Reisevermittlungsgewerbe, 30. August 1938, Bestand Rep. C 20 I. I b, Signatur Nr. 2537, LHASA MD, op. cit., p. 28.

⁵⁴ Report of Emigration Statistics for the Magdeburg District from 1 January 1938 – 30 June 1938, 17 September 1938, Bestand Rep. C 28 I f, Signatur Nr. 227, Band 3 LHASA MD, pp. 38–39.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵⁶ Reed, op. cit., 4 August 1999.

combination of the currency restrictions in Germany and immigration requirements of the Australian government, this was delayed until after the November pogrom.

This final difficulty involved the problem of accessing funds from blocked accounts in Germany and also the need to meet the requirements of those governments willing to accept Jewish refugees. Numerous restrictions and demands were placed on potential emigrants, which furthered the burden. The case of the family of Jakob Wurmser highlights this difficulty. Wurmser had received permits in 1937 for his family for Australia. His wife's brother, together with his wife and daughter, had also received permits and the six were to emigrate together. However, they faced the hurdle of securing the 'landing money' for their families, which was a requirement for entry into Australia, as his daughter recalled:

We had to have £200 landing money to come here [to Australia] because we didn't have a guarantor. So we had to apply to the *Devisenstelle* [Foreign Exchange Office] for that money. We had our permits already in 1937. They did not give us the money, so we managed to prolong the permits and we got them for another year. We wanted first £400; £200 for each family, and they didn't give it to us, so our parents reduced it to £200. We were sitting, waiting for £200! We had our tickets for Australia, we had our 'lift,' everything was organised; and then *Kristallnacht* came! My father said: "If we don't get out now, we will never get out." This he said the day after the pogrom.

My mother had a younger sister, who had left Germany in 1936 to go to Palestine. We sent them a telegram: "Please help!" And they helped. They sent £200 for us.⁵⁷

Both families eventually emigrated to Australia, arriving on 14 January 1939.⁵⁸

Clearly, from this example, even after emigrants had fulfilled all of the requirements in Germany, they still faced additional requirements imposed by the

⁵⁷ H. B., op. cit., 15 August 1997.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

countries of migration. The two female cousins reflected on why their parents had made this decision to leave prior to the occurrence of the *Reichskristallnacht*:

My father was absolutely pure, pure German, from generation to generation, and he always thought that because of this that nothing would happen to us, and also because he had the Iron Cross. For a long time he thought that nothing could ever happen to us, and then he suddenly woke up to it. (Cousin One)

My father was different. He wanted to leave as soon as Hitler came. He wanted to go to France to his brother, but my mother didn't want to go, because her whole family was in Magdeburg. I think my father was the one who really pushed, because he kept saying: "There is no future, and there will be a war, and if there is a war, then we are lost." And he was right! (Cousin Two)⁵⁹

In discussing the subject of emigration and the attitudes of the adult generation, the connection to family members and Germany feature prominently, and this quotation typifies the predicament of older German Jews, who had considerable life experience before 1933. Prior to November 1938 the majority of the Jewish population of Magdeburg still maintained hope. They were reluctant to leave their homes, extended families and livelihoods. The potential burden of emigration was also exacerbated by the limited destinations. Initially, Palestine featured primarily, but this was soon expanded to the European countries, the British Empire, South America and the USA. Most did not support Zionism, but even those dedicated Zionists were often disappointed with the realities of life in Palestine. The majority still felt connected to Germany.

Most interviewees agreed that Zionism was not very popular and that emigration to Palestine was considered a last option. Gisela Kent even went so far as to say that the community was anti-Zionist and that emigration to Palestine 'was the last thing anybody wanted to do.'⁶⁰ Gerry Levy also recalled the

⁵⁹ H. B. and R. Z., op. cit., 15 August 1997.

⁶⁰ Kent, op. cit., 5 January 1998.

immigration of his paternal uncle, Paul Levy, to Palestine in the early years of the regime and that the family was not at all happy about this.⁶¹ One interviewee recalls the attitude of his father, who had every intention of settling, together with his family, in Palestine, but changed his mind after visiting there in 1936:

Dad told us how poor things were in Palestine, that people he knew well, people of great professions, were actually hawking pencils and such on the street. I think that really knocked his Zionism very hard and after that he never mentioned it again.

It was always our intention to leave, but Dad was a bit reluctant to leave and throw himself into a completely different economic situation. I mean, we were fairly well off and he could only see himself making a very poor living. He didn't want to go to a strange country. He knew he'd have to be a paid labourer or something like that, so he was very reluctant to do that. So he took his time. Australia was our hope! But when we did get the entry visas to come to Australia and we did have a passage booked to come on a steamer for 1939, September 1939, we missed the boat. And we didn't make it.⁶²

After the visit to Palestine I still remember him saying later: "I wouldn't go there if they paid me!" That was the end of his Zionist interests.⁶³

Consequently, this family did not emigrate and endured the war years in Magdeburg. However, the same interviewee also recalled that his paternal aunt and uncle by marriage managed to coerce his paternal grandfather to emigrate to Palestine.⁶⁴ All interviewees remarked that by the time of the pogrom in November 1938, many Jews were reconsidering their positions. Gisela Kent recalled that when she left in August 1938 there were people who were becoming quite desperate. In her view, she felt that the realisation that the regime was not a temporary aberration had hit them quite suddenly.⁶⁵

One final and perhaps the most tragic obstacle in the decision-making process involving emigration was that of the separation of families. In Magdeburg, as

⁶¹ Levy, *op. cit.*, 7 November 1996.

⁶² Name withheld, *op. cit.*, 18 June 1999.

⁶³ Name withheld, *op. cit.*, 13 July 2004.

⁶⁴ Personal interview, name withheld on request (recorded), Sydney, 23 July 1999.

⁶⁵ Kent, *op. cit.*, 12 January 1998.

elsewhere, unmarried adult children, largely female, often remained behind with elderly relatives who would not or could not emigrate.⁶⁶ However, there existed situations where families would have to be broken up, if emigration was to occur. The teenager Inge-Ruth Herrmann left on a *Kindertransport* for England in August 1938. After her father's release from Buchenwald Concentration Camp in the wake of the *Reichskristallnacht*, he was faced with a very difficult decision. If he wanted to emigrate, he would have to do so alone, as his wife's emigration had been refused. His daughter recollected:

Shortly after I left they took my father to Buchenwald, but they let him out after a few months on condition that within one month he is out of Germany. For some unearthly reason they wouldn't let my mother out. At that time the only place you could go to was Shanghai. My father could have gone to Shanghai, but he wasn't going to leave my mother. He wrote to me as to how the position was. So they both perished. They went both to Theresienstadt – I have letters from them. I have family in Sweden, and through the Red Cross they sent to Sweden letters. We knew they were alive.....and right at the end they killed them.⁶⁷

The young teenager corresponded with her parents, but she was never to see them again. Both parents, Otto Herrmann and Regina Herrmann née Manneberg, were deported to Theresienstadt from Berlin on 28 October 1942.⁶⁸ There, they were reunited with Regina Herrmann's, mother and sister, Jenny and Käthe Manneberg. Approximately two years later Otto Herrmann was transported to Auschwitz on 16 October 1944. Twelve days later Regina Herrmann was sent to Auschwitz, as were her eighty-five-year-old mother and sister on 28 October 1944.⁶⁹ They all perished there.

⁶⁶ Kaplan, op. cit., p. 189.

⁶⁷ Poppert, op. cit., 9 January 1998.

⁶⁸ Institut Theresienstädter Initiative, ed., op. cit., p. 81.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

The decision to emigrate and the dilemmas Jews faced varied according to specific circumstances. However, a number of conclusions may be drawn. In the case of Magdeburg, by November 1938 the remaining Jews may have at any time considered emigration, but definitely not acted on it. Both legal restrictions in Germany and abroad acted as great disincentives. Countries offering refuge to Jews were generally not desired destinations. Finally, Jews were reluctant to leave their homes and their country of birth. They felt strongly about their perception of nation, of Germany and of Germanness; their extended families; and their livelihoods. The only way separation of family could be perceived and endured, was if emigrants told themselves that it was only a temporary measure. The reason why emigration prior to the *Reichskristallnacht* could be perceived as a quandary was that the majority of Jews felt that they still had choices and still possessed hope. Both of these were shattered on the evening and morning of 9–10 November 1938.