

Baruch (Bruno) Oppenheimer, November 10, 1978, Haifa

Jewish District School, Bad Nauheim

One day I visited a good friend of mine here in Haifa, with whom I often discussed history and problems. One day we came to the topic of the Nazi days in Germany and began speaking about Kristallnacht. My friend then said that he had just been typing a manuscript from a teacher Oppenheim about his days in Buchenwald. He gave me those pages to read and from the first few sentences I realized that the teacher Oppenheim, from Rhina, was my teacher in Bad Nauheim. I asked the late Mr. Oppenheim's daughter for a copy of the diary, and with the permission of Mrs. Blumental, nee Oppenheim, I can send these pages to my friend Dr. Knauss. (Mr. Oppenheim's widow lives here in Haifa in a retirement home, and I visited her a weeks ago too, and told her that her husband was my teacher.)

[Ed.: Rhina is a town not far distant from Bad Nauheim, and Siegfried Oppenheim was Baruch's teacher.]

[Ed: Dr. Erwin Knauss (1922-2013) from 1964 officially headed the Giessen archive. He promoted reconciliation between Jews and Christians and between Germans and Israelis.]

Now the question is how did I get into the Jewish District School in Bad Nauheim in the former "Hermann-Goeringstrasse"? I was born on May 24, 1925, in Giessen. My parents had a large manufactured goods shop at Neustadt 7. My father died in 1929 when I was 4 years old. My mother remained with my brother Bernd and I. I do not know how my mother fed us. We had relatives, but as a little boy I was not in a position to see everything. I already knew about Hitler (his name be cursed). I can still remember this devil's visit to Giessen. We had to close all curtains in the apartment. Then there were the demands to the residents of Giessen not to buy from Jews. The S.A. placed men in front of Jewish businesses in order to make entry to the shops impossible. I attended elementary school in Giessen and my brother Bernd attended the secondary school, where he had a scholarship as an excellent student. And then

[Ed: Bernd Oppenheimer (1923-1945) killed at Auschwitz]

came the heavy blow to my brother and me. On November 4, 1937, I was not woken to go to school, but in the first hours of the morning I woke up to find out that my dear mother had died. As a boy of 12 I could not understand the misfortune for the first few hours. When in the next few hours my grandfather and Uncle Adolf Bloch (a government councilor in Berlin) and other relatives came and attended the funeral, I slowly understood that I was now an orphan and, at my young age, without parental protection. At that time, I already had a legal guardian Isi Rosenbaum from the Westlange and he took care of all the funeral matters. After the funeral the whole family met at Isi Rosenbaum's. I was not told what led to the sudden death of my dear mother. At that meeting it was decided that my brother Bernd would finish the school year in Giessen and stay a family, it was the Bauer family on Asterweg, and that at the end of the school year he should then move to Berlin to live with my Uncle Adolf. I was told that in a few days I should go to the Jewish District School in Bad Nauheim, where there was also a boarding school. But it was not that easy for me. The day after the funeral I visited my friends, the Aharon siblings, who lived in Bahnhofstrasse. Their mother was a good friend of my mother. We already met on the street at their house, and they were holding the Giessen Zeitung [newspaper] in their hands. I asked why they had the newspaper, but they did not want to answer. However Danny Aharon said it was about your mother's death. I wanted to read it, but friends of mine did not want me to, so I grabbed the newspaper and ran away. And then I saw with my own eyes that my dear mother had taken her own life by jumping from our house into the street at night and was fatally injured as a result. And then my catastrophe became even greater. I never spoke about it with my relatives, not even with my brother. I absorbed everything to myself and had to deal with it alone.

[Ed: Isi Rosenbaum (1887-1942), died in Treblinka, was a first cousin of Theodor Oppenheimer. Adolf Bloch (1889-1938) was his uncle, his mother's brother. His grandfather was Anton Bloch (1866 – 1943), died in Theresienstadt.]

[Ed: According to other sources Bernd stayed with the Bauer family that lived at Asterweg 53 for one year from November 1937 to November 1938.]

And that was not easy. So, in November 1937 I came to the Jewish District School in Bad Neuheim. The school was housed in the Rothschild children's home on Hermann-Goeringstrasse. It is today known that the antisemites in Hesse were very active very soon after Hitler's ascent. And in the small villages of Hesse Jewish children could not attend school anymore. The Association of Jewish Communities founded the school in Bad Neuheim. The house that was made available was a very beautiful building, with marble, nice rooms for studying and sleeping, and had a nice park. So this boarding school became my new home. I think I settled in there very quickly and I had good rapport with the students, teachers, and especially with the head nurse Friedel Froehlich. She took care of me immediately, and was probably informed about my fate by my relatives. I later found out that my aunt and uncle Boscowitz from Weiden paid for my upkeep at school and also regularly sent me money and packages of sweets. The Director of the school was Mr. Betmann (his wife lives here in Haifa), and there was a large teaching staff. Today I cannot remember all the names anymore. There was a Mr. Bauer who was my main teacher, a Mr. Seelig from Friedberg, an academic councilor from Hanau (?), Mr. Levi, and so on. Then there was a supplier from Hamburg, Klebanski, the teacher Oppenheim from Rhina, the cook Mina, and more.

[Ed: Johanna Oppenheimer Boscowitz (1886-1942), died in KZ Izbica, and Albert Boscowitz (1878-1938) were his aunt and uncle from Weiden. Johanna was his father's sister. Albert was related to his mother.]

I have to add that the school was run along religious lines, which I was not used to from home. I soon found my way in this new world. The best proof thereof is that I am still religious today, and we have a pious family. During the holidays I often went to Weiden or with friends who invited me.

In the month of May, 1938, I turned 13 years old and had my Bar-Mitzvah. My dear late brother Bernd, who lived in Berlin with my late Uncle Adolf, both came to be with me on that Sabbath. This day is when a 13 year old boy enters Jewish life, one reads a certain portion of the Torah scroll, and from that day one is obliged to keep Jewish law. Generally, there was then a banquet, but since this was the year of my late mother's death, and the atmosphere in Germany was not appropriate, three of us went to a small Jewish guest house in Bad Nauheim to "celebrate" the holiday. My grandfather, unfortunately, could not attend. I did not know it at that moment, but this was the last time I saw my brother and uncle. History was moving very quickly in those days and every day brought something unpleasant. So the school year passed, and I went for the summer holidays to my aunt and uncle in Weiden. But this vacation too ended with tragedy. On the very day of my return trip to Bad Nauheim, while visiting relatives in Nurnberg, I got the message that on the same day that I left Weiden my uncle died. My aunt did not want me to come to Weiden for the funeral. So my Aunt Johanna, nee Oppenheimer, born in Ortenberg, became a widow, and my dear cousin Sabine a half-orphan. But this is not the full list. I was very sad and went back to Bad Nauheim for the start of the school year. But the story is like a snowball that gets bigger and bigger as it rolls and destroys everything on its path.

On November 9, 1938, as is known, the German official von Rath was shot by a Jewish student in Paris. Kristallnacht came. Synagogues all over Germany were torched. Men were arrested and sent to Buchenwald and Dachau. Our school was not spared. I still remember that teachers and employees who came from Poland

had to assemble at a particular place in Bad Nauheim. But the climax of these actions was that on November 10 a mass of Nazis gathered in our yard and the order was given that all students and employees, within a few minutes, had to gather in the school yard with their clothes etc. Since my suitcase was in my cupboard, I quickly started packing and was one of the first in the yard. And then I saw how the criminals threw all the books from the big library through the windows into the courtyard and, as I was leaving, a Bible was thrown on my head, and I still have the Bible to this day. But then the Nazis found the holy cabinet with the Torah Scrolls, the holiest writings of us Jews, and these were also thrown out, and everything was set on fire in front of our eyes. No one could do anything about it. That was a sad sight that one can never forget. And then the order came from the S.A. that all the residents of the school had to go and to report to the police station. We all thought that that would be the end of us. So the entire group set off with their luggage. Since we Jews believe in miracles, here in Bad Neuheim there was another miracle for us from the school. When we had all gathered at the police station a police officer came to us, and plainly said that nothing would happen to us, and he gave us an order to return to school. The police director further guaranteed that we should once again consider our school as our home. He himself took us back to Hermann-Goeringstrasse, and the S.A. criminals could not do anything about it. So we returned to the courtyard, where all that was left of the books and scrolls was a mountain of ash. That was a very sad sight. In the meantime, all the S.A. men had disappeared, and so we were able to reenter our school. Since the school was facing the street and it was very dark, the police sent carpenters and police officers to board up the windows so that we could be protected from everything. We did not know what more the S.A. wanted from us.

But here happened another miracle, we were slowly able to return to our studies, even if some of our teachers, like Mr. Oppenheim, were sent away to we did not know where. And there were telephone conversations for many students where parents inquired as to how their children were doing. I wrote immediately to my brother and uncle in Berlin, as well as to my grandfather. So the days passed, and we carried on with the daily routine, as normal as it could be in those days. And then one day, at the end of December 1938, as far as I can remember, we were gathered in the dining room, and our head nurse said that the Jewish regional association of the Jewish communities in Hesse was preparing a plan to send Jewish youth to neutral countries because they did not know what the days ahead would bring. Not all parents and students agreed that families should be separated. The dear head nurse Friedel Froehlich got in touch with my uncle and brother, and they decided (probably with a heavy heart) that I should emigrate to Switzerland with a group of my friends. Since we did not know the date of our departure, we had time to prepare things. Some of the parents came to say goodbye to their children. I decided with the head nurse to go to Giessen, in order to go to my parents' graves and say goodbye to them. That was my last visit there, but I did not know that at the time. My guardian Isi Rosenbaum accompanied me there. On the way there I saw the dome of the Steinstrasse synagogue lying on the road. That was a sad sight. So I returned to Bad Nauheim, and there I learned that our transport would leave Frankfurt for Switzerland on January 5. All 300 children from Hesse were supposed to meet at the Jewish Orphan's house on January 4. The director of the home helped us to spend the night, as the next day we had to leave home and family. A lot of people gathered at the train station to say goodbye to us. Parents, siblings, teachers and friends were all there.

And I was alone. I received mail from my family in Germany in the last few days, but I was not able to say goodbye to them in person. With many tears and sadness, the train that was supposed to take us to a new home started to move. To briefly end the story, we came to various children's homes in Switzerland, and everyone spent the war there until the gates to Israel and the USA opened. We, who lived together in a home near Basel, are still in contact today.

Unfortunately, my brother Bernd did not live to see the creation of the State of Israel. He died with one of the millions "there". I myself am in Israel since 1945. I have a beautiful family and we live in Haifa on the Carmel Mountain. As the bible states "from the Carmel comes redemption".

Haifa, 20.4.1978, Bruno Oppenheimer

These writings are dedicated to the Jewish and Christian friends from Germany and Switzerland who helped me walk this long journey alone and stood by me. May God bless them all.

Baruch-Bruno Oppenheimer

[Ed: For more on the fate of Bernd Oppenheimer, see <https://spureninvest.de/2023/03/15/oppenheimer-bernd/>]

[Ed: Bruno started his sojourn in Switzerland at a children's home in Langenbruck. But then at some point, it seems about 1941, he was sent to a labour camp, namely to "Arbeitslager fuer Emigranten, Bad-Schauenberg bei Listal". Both were in the region of Basel.]

[Ed: Bruno sporadically suffered from severe depression.]