

Impact

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Our Lady of the Elms

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It all began on March 31, 1933. It was from that day on that they began to disappear. I wasn't one of them, but I did witness it. They lost their jobs and were stripped of their rights. It still haunts me that I didn't do anything but watch.

Each time it started the same way: an announcement that was followed by loss. On March 31, 1933, the social workers lost their jobs; on April 7, they were sent away from government service occupations. One event I vividly remember happened on April 25. I went to school to find a few vacant seats, and some names weren't called during attendance. I don't know what I thought at the time, but now I realize that this is the first law that truly impacted me.

At the time I was eleven, too young to fully comprehend what was going on. I was friends with a few people who practiced the Jewish religion. My family and I were German and baptized Protestant, but we did not practice. My family consisted of my mother, father, younger sister, and me. We lived in Munich in a large apartment not far from the center of town. My father was a respected man who worked as a dentist in his own practice and my mother was a secretary for his business. We weren't particularly wealthy, nor were we poor.

During the time the first laws were announced, I remember questioning my parents about the matter. They said at the time that they didn't agree nor disagree with the laws. I remember the repetitive response of, "Do not worry, there is nothing we can do anyway."

The laws continued to come, and I slowly began to see the big picture. My parents avoided the topic during meals and no one talked about it in school. I spent a lot

of time on my own, contemplating the actions of those around me, but at thirteen I was still quite naive.

The devastation created by the laws only increased over the following years. In 1935, Jews were no longer allowed to be officers in the military and were prohibited from marrying anyone of German descent. In 1936, they lost their occupations as tax consultants, veterinarians, and public school teachers, and in 1937 they were no longer admitted into schools.

The day I remember the most was November 15, 1938. This law was the first that personally impacted me. All Jewish students were prohibited from public schools. One of my closest friends, Amalie, had been lucky enough to stay in school with us until now. It was on this day that she disappeared.

That evening at home while working on my school work, I quickly glanced over to my night table where I usually kept a picture of Amalie and me. The photo was taken one summer day at the park. We were both about eight, living happily before any of these laws and prejudices disrupted our lives. The photo was no longer there. I asked my parents about the photo, but they claimed to know nothing of it. I knew that they had taken it and I was angry. I was angry at my parents for taking my only memory of Amalie. I was angry at the leaders because they took away my friend. I was angry at the world for being so full of hate.

I wished I could do something to change things, but deep down I was terrified. My anger showed on the surface, but inside I was filled with fear and hopelessness. I was a sixteen year old girl who could do nothing.

It was only a week later that my parents announced to my sister and me that we were moving. My parents had located an apartment on the outskirts of Zurich, Switzerland. We would be leaving Germany in early December.

We packed and moved to Switzerland and watched as more laws emerged and eventually the war unfolded. The following years were some of the darkest times of my life. I was filled with feelings of fear, and guilt. I thought about Amalie, constantly wondering where she was and if she was safe. It only occurred to me later that she might no longer be alive. Every time this thought came, I would try to push it away with tears in my eyes. During these times I watched and hoped but didn't do anything at all.

It was these dark times in my life that led me to where I am today. I was a bystander who was too afraid to stand up. Now I step in and help the forgotten. I was drawn into a career as a lawyer, where I can repair the injustices that long ago destroyed the lives of those around me.

This past week I had an experience where I felt that I served my purpose. A woman came into the office with a small child in her arms and a toddler trailing along behind her. She walked up to the secretary desk and explained her situation. She was receiving bill after bill and couldn't afford to pay them. She was also struggling to support her children without the help of their father. This woman stood out to me; somehow she reminded me of all those whom I failed to help so many years ago. I introduced myself and made the decision to help her in memory of those whom I didn't. Together we sorted out all the bills and found ways for them to be paid. I am also working to find money to support her children. The woman's attitude changed from stressed and miserable to joyful and grateful. This gave me hope and made me feel

satisfied in what I had done. It would never make up for what happened in the past, but it was the start of a better future.

Works Cited

“Antisemitic Legislation 1933-1939.” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*, United States Holocaust Museum, c