



My German Question: Growing Up in Nazi Berlin

Professor Peter Gay

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In this book, an historian tells of his youth as an assimilated, antireligious Jew in Nazi Germany from 1933-1939 - "the story" says Peter Gay, "of a poisoning and how I dealt with it". Gay describes his family, the life they led, and the reasons they did not emigrate sooner, and he explores his own ambivalent feelings - then and now - toward Germany and the Germans. Gay relates that the early years of the Nazi regime were relatively benign for his family: as a schoolboy at the Goethe Gymnasium he experienced no ridicule or attacks, his father's business prospered, and most of the family's non-Jewish friends remained supportive. He devised survival strategies - stamp collecting, watching soccer, and the like - that served as screens to block out the increasingly oppressive world around him. Even before the events of 1938-39, culminating in Kristallnacht, the family was convinced that they must leave the country.

Gay describes the bravery and ingenuity of his father in working out this difficult emigration process, the courage of the non-Jewish friends who helped his family during their last bitter months in Germany, and the family's mounting panic as they witnessed the indifference of other countries to their plight and that of others like themselves. Gay's account adds a further perspective to the history of German Jewry.

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