

## 11 Deceptions and Cruelty

On January 25, 1995, I returned to Berlin. When I arrived and throughout my time there, which fell during the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the weather was bone-chillingly cold as well as unrelentingly drab and gray.

*How appropriate*, I thought as the plane landed. Obviously, I had conflicting feelings about this trip.

Ben was now nine. “I’m going on a mission” was typical of the excuses I gave him for my upcoming absence. Even to my ears, though, these excuses fell flat. “It’ll only be four days,” I would add lamely. Kissing him goodbye, it felt as though I were going to be gone an eternity.

*Am I worrying too much?* I worried to myself.

Upon arriving in Berlin, I went to the Savoy, right off the Kurfürstendamm on Fasanenstrasse. The Savoy Hotel, built in 1929, survived the war and was occupied by the British as their headquarters in the divided city. Among the Savoy’s other guests through history were Greta Garbo, Henry Miller, and Thomas Mann. I enjoyed speaking a little German with the taxi driver on the way to the hotel. And heading into Berlin’s Charlottenburg neighborhood, I found myself feeling like I knew my way around.

But I was haunted by thoughts of my family attending the synagogue on this same street before the Nazis ordered it shut down and

then, on Kristallnacht, demolished. What exactly were these legendary, comfortable hotel surroundings, to me, for this trip?

I needed conditions that would help me, psychologically, to do battle with my attorneys. My 1993 Berlin trip had featured exceptionally mild, sunny weather; Kerstin's friendly company; and the fatherly counsel of my advisor, Hans Frank. All of that, and much more—including unforgettable Berlin Philharmonic concerts, scrumptious tortes, and the cosmopolitan energy—had muted my association of Berlin with the colossal personal fiasco that was my 1967 trip.

But I was on guard against feeling too comfortable here now. I needed to keep in mind that this was the city Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, Eichmann, and Mengele viewed as their Jew-free Aryan capital. To achieve that they would stop at nothing, as history sadly proved. Accordingly, I discovered a good purpose for this dank, frigid, gloomy weather of January 1995: it helped me focus my thoughts and emotions on Berlin's dark side, empowering me to retain my determination to stand up for myself and my family.

My meeting with von Trott was scheduled for several hours after my arrival at the Savoy Hotel. While luxuriating in a nice warm bath, I reviewed some of the details of our 16 Wallstrasse case. *I'm here to get updated on the status of our case, I reminded myself. And as Hans Frank advised me, one goal should be to get von Trott and his colleagues to pay more meaningful attention to my family's Nazi-era history. But there are business blocks to that. What is at the core of these blocks?*

I gathered my thoughts, then formulated the answer for myself: *The Intrator and Berglas families might have different goals. Sure, the Berglasses, too, are parties to the 16 Wallstrasse case. They signed the same Sonex agreement we did. And yes, their relatives, too, suffered during the war.* But overall, I believed the Berglasses had prepared to escape from the Nazis far better than my grandfather Jakob Intrator. On the

Berglas side, they knew to get some of their assets out of Germany early. When the time came for them to escape, they had something to escape *with*, and somewhere to escape *to*. By contrast, my grandfather had waited until after the last minute, lost every *pfennig* to the Nazis, saw his health plunge, and then, essentially, didn't survive his escape, dying the day after his arrival in New York.

*Still, I thought, don't the Berglasses want to know that history as much as I do?*

Another voice inside my head countered, *Of course, but they, too, are aging like Alex and want matters resolved. And maybe they even need the money?*

I recognized that the 16 Wallstrasse case was far more complex than other Berglas property restitution claims, due to the *Ariseurs'* counterclaim on the building. In sum, 16 Wallstrasse was everything to us, while to the Berglasses, it was only one case among several. Nevertheless, my mind would not stop posing questions. *What does it mean to go from being well-to-do to being completely desperate as a result of cold-blooded persecution?* I wondered. I was developing a habit of trying to *feel* my way into the shoes of my Holocaust-era Jewish relatives.

As I was imagining their feelings and their point of view, and as my bath was coming to an end, I vowed to dig my heels in. *You are going to insist on uncovering as many details as possible of the forced auction of 16 Wallstrasse.*

Before leaving the Savoy for my meeting with von Trott, I enjoyed an *echt* German breakfast like the ones I remembered from my childhood: crusty rolls with soft-boiled eggs and *Milchkaffee*—coffee with warmed milk.

Guess who I finally met when I entered von Trott's offices that day?

Dorothea von Hülsen, my attorney. She was pleasant looking enough. But she offered me the most tepid of uninspiring handshakes, which did nothing to assuage my sense of uneasiness about her. She was supposed to be providing independent representation for us in the Intrator claim to 16 Wallstrasse. But then something popped out at me as I perused von Trott's letterhead while waiting for our meeting to begin.

Von Hülsen had her own private practice specializing in restitution claims. But listed on von Trott's letterhead as a partner in this firm was the name Dr. Karl-Christoph von Hülsen— Dorothea's husband. What exactly was the relationship between the big von Trott firm and Dorothea's smaller practice? Had they just thrown her a bit of business?

Whatever the answer to *that* question, Dorothea von Hülsen had thus far invariably toed the bigger law firm's line that Jack and I should agree to negotiate with the *Ariseurs*. Somewhere between the pit of my stomach, my heart, and my brain was an increasing awareness that this woman may have never intended to, nor would be able to, stand up to the Berglasses' attorneys, Lammek and von Trott, on behalf of the Intrator family.

In the conference room, von Hülsen and I joined Lammek and von Trott.

“May I suggest we speak English?” I asked, not wanting to wait for von Trott to assume that speaking German would be OK.

Von Trott then began. “Some pertinent background,” he said. “The LAROV has a backlog of one hundred eighty thousand restitution claims to process. In the wake of the reunification of Berlin, a glut of vacant buildings has come on the market, with a result that 16 Wallstrasse is worth only sixty percent of what one could have gotten for it two years ago. And the German government, which is paying

to maintain that property while managing it ahead of the case being resolved, is pressing for the building to be sold to private owners."

These numbers and circumstances meant nothing to me. What I wanted to know was, exactly *how* did the *Ariseurs* steal this building from my family?

Von Trott continued. "Going to court to challenge Heim & Gerken would take a great deal of money. To get them to drop their claim to 16 Wallstrasse would cost between thirty and fifty percent of the sale price."

In a monotone, von Trott elaborated on those thoughts, and details about those thoughts, and then more and more details until—maybe it was jet lag—I caught myself nodding forward before jerking my head back so I would stay awake. Von Trott did not blink, just droned right on.

Out of the corner of my eye, out the window over Kurfürstendamm, I saw it had started snowing, which naturally made the mother in me think of how Ben would soon be setting off with Greg to the Killington ski resort in Vermont. Rapidly enough, I brought my mind from the Green Mountain State back to this Berlin attorney's conference room, where von Trott was saying, "The wisest, most practical thing to do with 16 Wallstrasse is to reach a quick settlement in the case. The best way forward would be to not even contest the Heim & Gerken heirs' claim. Get the building sold, and then split the money between your family members and the Heim & Gerken heirs. Agreeing to *that* process will move the 16 Wallstrasse case to the top of the LAROV's pile."

Von Trott plainly was unaware of how callous he sounded. How could he imagine that I would agree to split the money from the sale of 16 Wallstrasse with members of the Aryan family who had stolen the building from my Jewish grandfather?

The next thing von Trott said, though delivered in his droning monotone, hit my ears like a thunderclap. “There’s a rumor that inside 16 Wallstrasse, Nazi flags were produced.”

I was completely floored. “Do you mean to tell me that the Nazi flag was manufactured inside—and I repeat for emphasis—*inside* the building that the Nazis stole from my family?”

He nodded.

How could this information only now be emerging? Von Trott had spent the lion’s share of the time allotted for this meeting aggressively pushing for us to settle with the *Ariseurs*, Heim & Gerken, but he was only *now* dropping this bomb as if blandly noting that it had started to snow outside.

I gasped, “Nazi flags! With swastikas. My God!”

Von Trott was silent.

Had von Trott’s shock revelation been a sort of Freudian slip? Did he mean to tell me this? What was going on? Until now, I thought his motivations were straightforward and bottom-line driven. Might he be feeling culpable for pressuring the Intrator heirs to negotiate with the *Ariseurs* while keeping concealed from us the dirty secret that enthusiastic Nazi Party members—true believers, swastika flag-makers—had taken part in stealing the building from our family, Aryanizing it through a forced auction?

How did this bombshell not change everything in the case? Why were these attorneys not seeing that it did? Why was von Trott not excited to use this information to our advantage?

Another question: Did I *really* believe that looking across the conference room table towards Clemens Lammek and Dorothea von Hülsen for support, as I did, would really have any good effect? Both had their heads lowered, reading documents. Obedient German children!

I took a breath, then said flatly, “No one but a Nazi could have been mass-producing Nazi flags.”

The trio of attorneys seemed uninterested. Von Trott responded nonchalantly, “We have no way of getting Nazi Party member information. And if we *could* determine that the *Ariseurs* of 16 Wallstrasse were Nazi Party members, it wouldn’t make any difference in this case, because at the time of the forced auction, so many people were members of the Nazi Party.”

What did he mean by that? That just any old person could have gotten an order for the mass production of Nazi flags? Was there not some sort of hierarchy among those who opted into the Nazi Party? Was there no difference between your average Aryan in the street with a lapel pin and somebody who established an entire flag-making company to boost a brutal dictatorship?

I could barely contain myself. It simply *had* to matter to our 16 Wallstrasse case that after Aryans stole our industrial building through a forced auction, the Nazi flag was produced inside. Think of the high-level Nazi Party connections Aryans must have needed in late 1938 to be able to steal a center-city Berlin property from Jewish owners and then get awarded a contract to produce Nazi flags.

“The *Ariseurs* of 16 Wallstrasse, these Heim & Gerken people, who *were* they, exactly?” I asked. Strangely, until this meeting with von Trott, it had not occurred to me to try to find out independently who the Heim and Gerken clans were. Why had I not looked? They were our adversaries in this case, but I had not yet requested any paperwork attesting to what they had done before, during, and after the Holocaust. I must have been stunned, without any agency, waiting for the grownups to do something. I was still under the sway of their authority, and vestiges of the anguish I felt during my lonely 1967 trip

to Berlin were still, however subconsciously, stopping me from seeing things as clearly as I should.

With evident impatience, von Trott shook his head and gave a quick flick of his hand, brushing my question away as though he were swatting a fly. I glared at him. I was stunned at his apparent disregard for its impact on me and, more importantly, on the case.

What was his mindset that enabled von Trott to be so blasé about the likelihood that Heim and Gerken had been Nazi Party members? Was this issue not at the core of the work he was supposed to be doing? Yes, during the Third Reich, obedience to the Führer was required and enforced, yet only about 10 percent of the population were actual Nazi Party members.

Von Trott was attempting what I liked to call a “dilution effect,” minimizing the importance to my case of the Nazi Party membership of the *Ariseurs* of 16 Wallstrasse. To my face, this lawyer was incorrectly alleging that because “so many people” had been Nazi Party members, the issue could not possibly be of any importance.

From von Trott’s junior colleagues, not a peep—as though my desire to learn the truth were out of line. What was I supposed to do? Forget that once *Ariseurs* stole 16 Wallstrasse from my family, they used our building to mass-produce Nazi flags?

Von Trott, I suspected, was using a slippery, disingenuous tactic with me. Not by mere Freudian slip had he come out with this information about the Nazi flag having been produced at 16 Wallstrasse. Rather, he must have thought I likely would find out about it one way or another, so he wanted to protect himself against eventual accusations that he had been derelict in his contractual duty by neglecting to supply me with crucial intelligence about our stolen, Aryanized property. In short, he was covering himself, revealing to me the production

of the Nazi flag, then immediately distorting the fact by alleging it to be of no importance.

If my presumption about von Trott's motives was correct, he was straddling a moral fault line. His responsibility to do relevant research was written into our contract, and he was competent to carry out the needed research. And surely before now, he had known about the production of the Nazi flag at 16 Wallstrasse. However, he was *not* mentioning the production of the Nazi flag at 16 Wallstrasse in order to strengthen my position against the *Ariseurs*; he was only mentioning it in order never to be accused of having *not* mentioned it.

Exasperating! I was experiencing a full-on, all-out agonizing simmer. But if I had laid into these attorneys, which they richly deserved, what good would it have done me? At one point, having a moment alone with von Hülsen, I asked, "Did *you* know that the *Ariseurs* used 16 Wallstrasse as a Nazi flag factory?"

"Well, yes, but I hasten to point out that this fact does not prove your grandfather lost the building on account of antisemitism."

That was her alibi for never having told me the Nazi flag was made in our building.

I was livid.

What in von Hülsen's nature, or her circumstances, had kept her from informing me about this momentous crack in the case? Did she feel she knew best? Or, with von Trott and Lammek having more leverage, did she feel she lacked the authority to discuss the subject with me? Given that Jack and I had veto power over decisions in the 16 Wallstrasse case, my expectation that my own assigned attorney would tell me so important a fact as this one was entirely reasonable.

But these attorneys had the goal of selling the building and wrapping the case up as quickly as they could, whereas my goal of stopping the *Ariseurs* from profiting off the situation was becoming ever more

significant for me. How dare these German attorneys have kept this Nazi-shielding secret from me!

I now was more worried than ever. Von Hülsen's husband worked with von Trott's firm. Was von Hülsen, therefore, falling into line behind von Trott and not thinking independently, or was she in conflict with the historical role of women in Germany, described as *Kinder, Küche, Kirche*—children, kitchen, and church? That couldn't be, not in the late twentieth century. It had to be about the appearance that the Intrigators were being represented independently from the Berglasses. But what better way than bringing me into the discussion?

I certainly was in no position to fire her, as I simply did not have the financial resources to sign full-time with Hans Frank or some other attorney. I felt compromised and stuck, dependent on professionals I could not trust.

Just then, von Hülsen surprised me and led me in another direction.

“Why don't you try to find out if any of the tenants at 16 Wallstrasse were Jewish?”

“Why?” I asked.

“The Nazis' antisemitic laws often destroyed Jewish-owned businesses. If Jewish tenants at 16 Wallstrasse lost their businesses through Nazi antisemitism, and so were not able to pay rent to your grandfather, how could he afford the ongoing expenses of the building? This would, possibly, be an explanation of how Nazi antisemitism caused your grandfather to lose the property in a forced auction.”

A light bulb went off in my head. Once again, an attorney was giving unintended emphasis to a detail crucial to my case. “Were there Nazi tenants in the building too?” I asked. “If so, is it not correct that under Nazi law, they would have been under no obligation to pay rent to my Jewish grandfather?”

There was a pained silence before I pressed the matter by asking, “Who exactly were they? Before the forced auction, who were the tenants at 16 Wallstrasse?”

Von Hülsen shook her head. “I don’t know,” she confessed.

Was this feigned ignorance? Was it really so hard to grasp the importance of the answers to these questions? Suddenly, von Hülsen said, “There is a man still living in Berlin who, for forty years, was the *Hausmeister*, the superintendent at 16 Wallstrasse.”

“Do you know how I can get in touch with him?”

“No.”

I was now really annoyed, not to mention suspicious. Why were these key details being offered in such a slow drip? Who was researching this case? Anybody? Was von Hülsen giving me some sort of fake-out charade of being forthcoming? Had she known about this 16 Wallstrasse *Hausmeister* before? If so, might I have had a chance to contact him?

How eager I felt, now, to find this superintendent, in order to learn whether he knew anything about the Nazi flag production issue. But I could see that *this* day, I was not going to learn more from any of these attorneys. At a time when I needed to stay sharp, they were wearing me down with their personality styles, rattling off so-called facts devoid of useful detail. Vexed and frazzled, I yearned to escape from their crazy-making, guileful insincerity.

I returned to my hotel, retreating under the bed’s comforting down covers, much as I used to do to escape from my parents and their innumerable challenges. The lawyers’ information tease had me slipping into a revolving state of confusion, rage, and defeat. I was too exhausted to sort it all out. Of course, I was somewhat foggy from

jet lag, but on top of that, the innuendos about the Nazi flag and the *Hausmeister* and the tenants at 16 Wallstrasse were starting to make me feel lost and ungrounded, the way I felt when I was supposed to meet the porter in 1967.

Hoping to distract myself, I turned on the television. Every available station was broadcasting programming about Auschwitz, in observation of the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of the remaining prisoners there.

There was no way I could escape the topic, so I decided on a more personal confrontation with it. Throwing off the warm quilt, I called the front desk to hire a car and driver. What I was about to do was travel twenty-two miles north of Berlin, to the site of the former concentration camp in the Sachsenhausen district of the town of Oranienburg, minutes away from Berlin.

At the time, I had not discovered the letters that revealed my relative Max Karp had been taken to Sachsenhausen. Unable to read through all of the letters in my father's files before his house was sold, I brought them to my office with the hopes of photocopying them. At first, I searched for any information about Wallstrasse and evidence of direct antisemitism for the legal case; eventually, I would delve into the personal letters, including those pertaining to the fates of my family members.

Had I but known about Max—how much more terrible and poignant my visit would have been! As it was, though, I felt powerfully compelled to make this trip.

*Do what you're most afraid of, Joanne. Just do it. Get dressed and go. It's not the first camp you've been to. Remember how angry you were in 1967 when you realized Dachau was only ten miles outside Munich, so they all had to have known what was happening? Go get angry.*

I also wanted to pay my respects to the murdered Jews. Given the

overwhelming enormity of the crimes committed against them at the camp, paying respects was a small gesture. Nonetheless, I was going to do so. Instead of retreating to my bed, dominated by my anxieties, I felt impelled to do the opposite.

I arrived at the gate with its sadistic taunt: *Arbeit macht frei*. “Work sets you free.” In a cold rain, I waded through slush and mud, walking from barrack to barrack.

In 1936, the Nazis used Jewish slaves to build this camp, this *Konzentrationslager*. Heinrich Himmler—the “Reichsführer of the Schutzstaffel”—conceived of Sachsenhausen as a prototype and testing ground for all other concentration camps. As the Reich was metastasizing, Himmler in 1938 moved the central administration for all concentration camps from Berlin to Oranienburg.

My driver had come onto the grounds but kept an appropriate distance behind me. I did not see other people at Sachsenhausen this day. Entering a drab building, I found myself in a damp room that stank of mold. Here, I learned, Nazi doctors tortured Jews in the name of scientific inquiry. The white-tiled room had antiquated medical equipment hung on its walls, as well as an examination table for experiments and “medical autopsy.” From many years of poring over photos, articles, and books about rooms like this, I was not unfamiliar with the setup.<sup>1</sup> I had forced myself out of a warm, cozy hotel room into the world of my nightmares. And now this Sachsenhausen torture chamber seemed perfectly designed to overwhelm my well-honed counterphobic strategies. It was giving me considerable pause, but I managed to push myself forward through this disquieting concentration camp footslog.

The central question remained: How could so many Germans, men and women both—including doctors, lawyers, teachers, tradesmen, bakers, shopkeepers, restaurant owners, and waiters—have set

aside their everyday ethics, education, and understanding of society to become murderers of Jews? That question was at the heart of my enduring interest in studying cold, ruthless people who lack all empathy. It is what led me to conduct a study on psychopaths' processing of emotional language.

Were Nazi physicians similar to the psychopaths I studied? Or had they only morally devolved under the specialized conditions created by Adolf Hitler? What were these Nazi doctors like before 1933? These torture chambers, these killing rooms, required a pervasive absence of empathy or some hardwired theory that dehumanized Jews and others. Once the Nazis came to power, did previously normal-seeming German doctors believe that the faux-medical barbarities they perpetrated on Jews, Slavs, Roma, and homosexuals were justified by those "others" medically contaminating the Nordic ideal? For many individuals who find themselves in a Nazi-like social environment, rationalization often is safer than saying no to barbarity. Rationalization was facilitated by particular psychodynamics relevant to Germans.

The apparent paradox of intelligence and culture on the one hand and murderous, sadistic behavior on the other is present not just within German society before and during World War II but also within other nationalities subject to authoritarian regimes. The power wielded by such regimes warps the natural interaction of conscious and unconscious thoughts, manifesting in primitive behaviors no longer kept in check by whatever conscience a person had.

In early development, a child faced with an authoritarian parent (one who requires strict obedience) perceives that approval will come only if their parents' expectations are complied with; resistance will not be tolerated. Such children learn to perceive their parents' wishes more clearly than their own. We all know that unlike other mammals,

humans are more helpless and dependent, requiring more time in the care of their parents, leaving the child little choice but to conform. Longings and rebellions do not disappear but are subordinated and suppressed. In time their persistence is regarded as a threat to the child's compliant facade, even seen as immoral or perverse. As development unfolds, the child's ability to perceive not only their own feelings but those of others fades. Consequently, during late adolescence, the task of formulating an authentic identity is beyond reach.

Feelings are at the foundation of identity. Within the suppressed atmosphere of an authoritarian upbringing, young people hunger for an ideology that offers a defined, glamorous, or powerful identity. At the same time, beneath the impeccable facade develops—perhaps is even cultivated—a remote distance, often perceived as an air of superiority. On occasion, however, long-suppressed fundamental wishes, now suffused with rage, emerge in a characteristic viciousness and taste for perversion—a characteristic of Nazi Germany, especially among its leaders, and certainly among those who presided over the concentration camps. Perversion here means taking pleasure out of inflicting pain.

At least since the chancellorship of Otto von Bismarck in the late nineteenth century, authoritarian rule permeated much of the German culture down to the individual family. Authority was to be followed; resistance was unthinkable. At every level, compliance became almost automatic. The rage generated by such compliance as it emerged could be directed towards the noncompliant or at an imagined foreign power. Such a force empowered both the unification of Germany in 1871 and its subsequent imperialism. German dominance was sanctioned by the highest authority, and German aggression ignited the Great War and its savage conclusion in the Versailles Treaty in 1919, meant to disarm and punish a still-threatening Germany. After the country's

humiliating defeat in World War I, the authoritarian soil from which Germany's Nazi Party grew was highly fertile ground. The defeat was manipulated into a striving for superiority, Hitler using the myth of a German master race. His chosen people, Aryans, would psychically merge with him and, subliminally, create a force outside the limits of life and death to become the thousand-year Reich.

To consolidate his following, Hitler needed an outside enemy. The long history of German antisemitism made Jews the ideal perpetrators. "It is them, not us": this well-honed, centuries-old strategy binds groups of like-minded people who feel victimized, offering their psyche some stability, if only temporarily. Through an unconscious psychological dynamic, what is intolerable inside a person in the group, such as a sense of failure or weakness, gets projected on the designated "other," and then the "other" is attacked. A bully does it in the playground; Hitler did it in places like Sachsenhausen. The doctors saw their role as ridding the German people of the contaminants corrupting the German ideal.

Trudging on through the sodden muck of Sachsenhausen, and deeply feeling the weight of this place where Nazis perfected their use of gas chambers, I suffered through waves of dread. While I was out there in the marrow-chilling cold among the desolate barracks, vaguely formed thoughts and their accompanying negative emotions free-floated through me. Doubts about the importance of my case. Flickering impressions that, perhaps, the attorneys, the Berglasses, or both were right to want to get the case settled quickly, even if that meant negotiating with the *Ariseurs*.

Yet I found myself obsessing again over the *Ariseurs* of 16 Wallstrasse. After they stole our building, what exactly had they done

on Kristallnacht? What were the Heim & Gerken *Ariseurs* who stole my Jewish family's building doing, thinking, and feeling when the Nazis imprisoned six thousand Jews *here*, in Sachsenhausen, in the wake of Kristallnacht?

But there was more than the question of what the *Ariseurs* were doing on Kristallnacht. Another element in my swirling thoughts was the vague notion that 16 Wallstrasse was *just a building*. Nobody died as a direct result of it being stolen from Jewish owners.

Then, too, there were my feelings about the Nazi flag having been mass-produced at 16 Wallstrasse. As I was thinking about it at Sachsenhausen, the information regarding the Nazi flag seemed like some paltry crumb I could follow (or not) towards more crumbs, Hansel-and-Gretel style, not knowing whether the crumbs would lead me out of the forest or into an oven.

Nonetheless, despite doubts that troubled me at various times, now resurfacing at Sachsenhausen, I had always wound up determined to fight on. And it was there at Sachsenhausen that I finally understood why I persisted. While working on "The Persecution of Mr. Jakob Intrator," I learned about the four additional prime center-city Berlin properties stolen from my grandfather, in payment of punitive, confiscatory taxes that the Nazis were levying only on Jews. Those Nazi acts were targeted at Jews to make them feel worthless and hopeless. And there had been umpteen similar additional cases of Nazi persecution of Jews. It was not the *buildings* that were persecuted when they were stolen; it was the *Jewish owners* who were persecuted. Therefore, the thought that 16 Wallstrasse was "just a building" was not an accurate framework for thinking about my case.

In that instant of realization, I felt free from the waves of noxious, miasmic thoughts.

For many people, the connection—the through line between

the milder forms of Nazi persecution, like forcing Jews out of their jobs and stripping them of their citizenship and assets, and the Final Solution—might seem obvious. But to me in 1995, it had not been obvious until that day at Sachsenhausen. Then it all came together and I saw it like some perverse, sickening rainbow of evil: the forced auction of 16 Wallstrasse and similar crimes committed against so many other Jews formed an arc of injustice that bent towards concentration camps like Sachsenhausen and the attempted so-called Final Solution.

In the frigid wind and rain, I tried to fathom the depths of depravity that led the Nazis to the crimes committed here. There were ritualized humiliations, such as forced singing. At the end of a long day's slave labor, Sachsenhausen prisoners would be herded into the prison yard. There, standing at length in the cold—exhausted and deliberately undernourished—the prisoners would be commanded to sing songs that mocked their condition, for example, "*Fröhlich sein*," which means "Be happy." They had to sing the song over and over again, depleted and humiliated, until the Nazis gave them permission to stop.<sup>2</sup>

And then there were the killings. In the early stages of perfecting their techniques, the Nazis would tell individual prisoners they were being placed in a small room to have their height and weight measurements taken. Often, music would be playing in the room. A Nazi would then open a small panel in the room's rear wall and shoot the prisoner in the neck.

The matter was settled in my mind. There was to be no discussion. There would be no negotiating with the *Ariseurs*.

Before I left the German capital, I stopped again at my father's former home at 185 Kurfürstendamm, which I had first visited during my

1993 trip. Seeing that the building's directory listed commercial tenants, I realized it would likely be easy to just walk right inside, unlike last time, when some construction had been in progress. So I did. I went directly up to my grandparents' floor. I had never been inside the building, let alone in their former apartment. What I found on their floor was not a hallway with apartments but instead a modern law office. The space faced north onto Kurfürstendamm. My eyes went to the oversized windows and the balcony familiar to me from family photos.

"Feel free to look around," the office manager said, after I told him my family had lived there.

I went immediately to the balcony. I knew my Jewish family had stood in the very same spot where I was now as they watched Hitler in his limousine, the sidewalks thick with bystanders. Though the law firm was sleek and shiny in its chrome and pale grays, with sparse if elegant office furnishings, family photos had given me a sense of how the apartment looked in the 1930s. There had been high ceilings bordered with gracious, intricate moldings. It did not take much effort to imagine inlaid wooden floors covered with Persian rugs, an enormous dining table set for twelve, brocaded dining chairs, velvet couches, and a grand piano.

I had college girlfriends who had grown up in New York City apartments not unlike my father's apartment in Berlin. Every time I stepped into their homes, I was in awe of the quiet wealth and the ease with which these friends led their lives. They were accustomed to maids and to shopping on Fifth Avenue. Their families vacationed together in Switzerland and the South of France. I was envious of the casual affluence they'd enjoyed throughout their childhoods. Now in my grandparents' formerly grand home, I could taste that once-upon-a-time life in Berlin, knowing the misery and destruction that

ultimately befell my family. I was flooded with heartache and sadness, thinking of my father, so often desperately sick in our tiny row house in Queens.

On the flight back to the United States, I brooded over the Berlin lawyers' thought processes: their sophomoric mix of so-called facts and innuendos, their double-talk and repetitions. My brooding led me to a question: Was I going to have the stamina to see this struggle through? And beyond the isolated question of stamina, would I be able to balance the time requirements of the 16 Wallstrasse case with my work and family life?

I sighed and gazed out the window, seeing nothing.