

# Discovering Jewish Blood

The Nuremberg Laws turned Jews from German citizens into “residents of Germany.” The laws transformed the lives of Jews all over Germany, including thousands of people who had not previously known their families had Jewish heritage. Among them were Marianne Schweitzer and her siblings.

Although we were not a churchgoing family, we observed Christmas and Easter in the traditional ways and belonged to the Lutheran church. My parents, my three siblings and I were all baptized and I took confirmation classes with Martin Niemöller, the former U-boat commander and his brother who substituted when Martin was in prison for anti-Nazi activities.

It was in 1932 that my [older] sister Rele provoked my father to reveal our Jewish ancestry for the first time. She played the violin and rejected a violin teacher because he “looked too Jewish.” Our father had responded in a rather convoluted way by saying, “Don’t you know that your grandmother came from the same people as Jesus . . . ?”

Our mother’s side, the Körtes, were “Aryan” by Hitler’s standards. But our father’s parents, Eugen Schweitzer and Algonde Hollaender were Jews born in Poland who had been baptized as adults. My father and his two brothers were considered Jews by Hitler’s laws. Though all were married to non-Jewish wives, our lives were dramatically changed. The whole family was devastated and worried about our future. My mother’s “Aryan” side stood by my father. My Körte grandmother said, “If Hitler is against Ernst [my father], I am against Hitler.”

We heard no anti-Jewish remarks at home, but the antisemitism of that time was so pervasive and the images in periodicals such as *Der Stürmer* so ugly, that Rele later wrote of her shock at learning her relation to “monsters.” She considered herself “the typical German girl with blond, curly hair.” I took the news more in stride. I was happy to be able to stay in school and glad not to be eligible to join Hitler Youth. . . .

In September of 1935, the Nuremberg Laws were introduced. My “Jewish” father was barred from treating “Aryan” patients, employing “Aryans,” attending concerts or the theater, or using public transportation. Rele had passed her Abitur, the certification of completing a high school degree, but as a Mischling, was ineligible to attend university. She couldn’t marry her “Aryan” boyfriend Hans, a medical student.<sup>1</sup>

The Schweitzers were certainly not the only Germans to be penalized for having “Jewish blood.” By 1935, explains historian Martin Gilbert,

The search for Jews, and for converted Jews, to be driven out of their jobs was continuous. On 5 September 1935 the SS newspaper published the names of eight half-Jews and converted Jews, all of the Evangelical Lutheran faith, who had been “dismissed without notice

<sup>1</sup> Marianne Schweitzer, afterword to Melita Maschmann, *Account Rendered: A Dossier on My Former Self*, trans. Geoffrey Strachan (Cambridge, MA: Plunkett Lake Press, 2013).

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and deprived of any further opportunity of acting as organists in Christian churches." From these dismissals, the newspaper commented, "It can be seen that the Reich Chamber of Music is taking steps to protect the church from pernicious influence."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Holt, 1985), 47.