

No Boundaries to Hatred

(a/k/a Jan Yager)

By Janet Barkas

LONDON—My grandmother was angry that I could bring myself to journey to Germany. To make matters worse, I was flying Lufthansa from New York rather than Pan Am. I was meeting such former associates of Adolf Hitler as Albert Speer, architect and chief of armaments of the Third Reich; Gerda Christian, Hitler's secretary from 1933-45; and Winifred Wagner, Richard Wagner's daughter-in-law. It was the culmination of a year's research on Hitler.

Heidelberg was my first stop, to see Albert Speer. The students at the bar the first evening of my arrival were not interested in my background. Their hostility was directed at my Berlitz German and the fact that I was American. I met a young, blond-haired man who claimed agreement with the philosophical basis of National Socialism. "If only Hitler had not campaigned against the Jews," he said, "everything else he wanted for Germany was positive."

In a student cafeteria at Heidelberg I met a young married couple. We walked to a nearby restaurant and talked there for hours, sipping draughts of beer. Then they asked the question: "Are you Jewish?" "Yes." The young wife drew back, seeming confused by my admission. "But you don't look Jewish and your name isn't Jewish." I explained that it was a

Greek name. The conversation petered out. The next morning, Albert Speer. His attractive, bronzed wife, casually dressed in brown pants and matching knit top, provided freshly squeezed orange juice. Speer discussed my research on Hitler. It was a pleasant chat, though he seemed to be recapitulating sections of his book on the Third Reich.

During the long train ride up the Rhine to Düsseldorf, I vowed to put to Mrs. Christian those questions I had not asked of Speer. Her flat was furnished and in the style of her most important period, the thirties. "Did you dislike the Jews?" I asked.

"You don't know what it was like," she said. "A Jewish girl of twenty was like a German girl of sixteen. My mother was afraid to let me associate with them. They wore lipstick and were 'fast.'" There was no hesitancy in her voice. She continued eagerly. "It was terrible. All the doctors and lawyers were Jews. The Germans were out of work, too, and couldn't get a job because the Jews had them all." She did not disagree that "Hitler was the best boss" she had ever had.

Back down the Rhine, Dachau. Everything clean and new. The original barracks had been torn down. Only replicas stood there. In front of one of the gas chambers was a young family, the father taking pictures of his son. Is this what Dachau will be—a tourist attraction immortalized in a scrapbook?

From Dachau, the long train ride to

Bayreuth, the national center for Wagnerian opera and the home of Winifred Wagner, Richard Wagner's daughter-in-law and associate of Adolf Hitler. We talked for over two hours.

"Did you know I provided Hitler with the paper and pencils he used to write *Mein Kampf*?" she asked proudly in perfect English, since she was born and attended school in England.

I asked: "How do you feel about anti-Semitism?"

"Oh, it's not the same today," she said coldly. "It's hard to tell who is a Jew now. The differences are not as great."

"But I can always tell a Jew when I see one," she observed staring directly at me.

Time had not brought Mrs. Wagner to reconsider her attitudes any more than it had mellowed Mrs. Christian.

Back in New York, I met a handsome 40-year-old. He had never dated a Jewish girl before and felt compelled to tell me why he hated Jews. "There are only 14 million Jews in the world. Any people which gets into so much trouble over so many years and the Jews in New York are the worst. They are so obnoxious."

So hatred was not just in the heart of the country, any particular country. It was something in the heart of a person.

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