

**Gerda Kappes tells her mother-in-law about the pogroms in Bebra
on 7 and 9 November 1938¹**

Handwritten letter from Gerda Kappes² to Clara Kappes,³ dated 11 November 1938

Dear Mother,

Thank you very much indeed for your dear, long letter; we really enjoyed it and also were glad to hear that you are all doing well. We are physically fit again too. I'm so glad that my illness is a thing of the past, thanks to the heat-therapy lamp, and besides, in these last few days physical suffering would have been an additional burden. You've surely been wondering why we haven't written to you before now. We would have written much sooner, too, but we wanted to calm down first, so that our account of the latest occurrence is not so drastic and we don't give you such a scare. There have been major persecutions of Jews here on account of the assassination of Legation Counsellor vom Rath. On Monday night⁴ various Party fanatics forced their way into the homes of Jews, pulled the Jews out of bed, and smashed everything to pieces. All the furniture was knocked over, porcelain, glass, windowpanes, in general everything within reach overturned and smashed. Curtains torn down, fabrics and also, to some extent, foodstuffs sent flying, electric lamps and bulbs, even the electricity cables destroyed, and in the Emanuels'⁵ home the built-in washbasins, bathtub, and even the Mettlach⁶ tiles were ruined. All night long we heard the din and the sound of breaking glass, but thought only that there must have been a serious car accident.

We didn't sleep all night, but in the darkness, even in the street, all we could see was a big crowd of people; I think half the residents of Bebra were astir that night. The next morning, Lisbeth told us what had happened. We immediately went to your apartment⁷ to see whether all was still in order. We found your flat in tip-top shape, even our cubby-hole for sausages, your WC, and your cellar rooms were unharmed, everything else was in a shambles. The Jew Emanuel was standing amid the ruins, not a single window bar left in the house, not a door, even the heavy front door made of oak is no longer in place; a picture of horror and great misery. Then in the afternoon all the Jews left, really they had to, because they had no place to stay, not even a bed was still in one piece. The next night was quiet. Then, Wednesday night, it started again, because Mr vom Rath had died

1 In the private possession of Hans H. Kappes; excerpts published at: http://www.hassia-judaica.de/Orte/Bebra/Vor_aller_Augen_1933_bis_1942/index.html#seite18b.html [last accessed on 11 April 2018]. This document has been translated from German.

2 Gerda Kappes, née Wenderoth (1906–1987), housewife; in 1934 married the lawyer Werner Kappes (1899–1979); in 1940 conscripted to work for Bebrit, which produced plastic articles.

3 Clara Kappes, née Lips (b. 1870), housewife; from 1892 to 1934 married to the pastor Adolph Kappes; at the time of the pogrom Clara Kappes was staying with her daughter in Kiel.

4 The night of 7 Nov. and early morning of 8 Nov. 1938.

5 Manfred Emanuel (1892–1942), retailer; owner of a manufactured goods distributor in Bebra. In 1939 he moved to Aachen with his wife, Martha Emanuel, née Oppenheim (b. 1893); he died in Majdanek concentration camp.

6 Ceramic floor tiles named after the German city of Mettlach.

7 Clara Kappes lived on the second floor of the house belonging to Manfred Emanuel at 7 Hersfelder Straße. Gerda Kappes and her husband lived about 300 m away, at 49 Nürnberger Straße.

on Wednesday, of course. The second wave was a way of taking revenge. Again, we heard a terrible racket and again did not sleep at all, because axe blows sound so very scary at night. This time, all the furniture, in fact every single item, was removed from the Jews' homes and piled up and burned on Adolf-Hitler-Platz. Silver, jewellery, the large amount of stored goods, and the incredibly large amounts of hoarded foodstuffs and money too, were, naturally, confiscated and secured by the police. Our apples, too, have been in the hands of the NSV⁸ in the meantime, but we brought them back today, that is, it had not been done on purpose. In these past few days I have run back and forth a good deal between our place and down there, to prevent your provisions from being taken away too, out of ignorance. Werner had much to do and thus could not look after such things. But Mr Ellenberg,⁹ the SS officer, asked me about everything that was yours, and Rex,¹⁰ too, was here to look around, because under no circumstances are you to lose anything; I was assured of that by all the people in leading positions, and a very careful approach is being taken there. Because everything is open, there was a guard down there again last night. Today we were down there a couple of times again, and in the Jews' apartment nothing is left but 2 cm pieces of broken glass. Now one can really understand what Schiller says in [the Song of] the Bell: 'empty window-holes are staring, horror-haunted'. The attic is still in relatively good shape, but that is due solely to the fact that no one knew for certain whether you might have rooms up there too. Now that we have cleared up this doubt, the things up there will probably be taken away too.

The warehouse is long since gone; Emanuel is said to have had things, only fabrics, valued at 50,000 marks; in addition they found foreign currency in substantial amounts in all the Jews' homes, also a disgrace, and a lot of money. The accounting records have all been secured. In this year, thus far, Emanuel is said to have had sales of 76,000 marks, can one believe such a thing? We know this from someone who is well informed about it, who naturally was also present at the time. The Emanuels' food provisions were displayed too; they were also quite a sight to see and very characteristic of these fearful people, who probably were afraid they would have to starve to death. Just think, 120 tins of food, endless numbers of jars with the finest poultry, goose, dove, chicken, etc., 200 eggs, 25 kilos of butter, 25 kilos of margarine, great stoneware crocks full of beef dripping, unknown quantities of Palmin,¹¹ 20 litres of salad oil, probably four clothes baskets full of apples, a great deal of jam, jelly, etc., I can't even list it all. Mr Ellenberg showed me everything; I had never seen such provisions, and to hoard food when there is such a fat shortage, and half of it surely would have gone off besides, all this was an absolute disgrace. The others had all stocked up well, but this was the largest hoard. All these things were taken by the NSV for its own uses, and they are to be distributed by the quickest means possible.

The city has so much to do now. All day long today, stores of goods and pantries have been cleared away; I hardly think they are through yet, because all the Jews have very large stocks of fabrics and household linens, which no one really knew about. Now the Jews are finally gone, and what will become of the houses, nobody knows. You can at least

8 Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt: National Socialist People's Welfare Organization.

9 Correctly: Fritz Ellenberger (b. 1878), tailor and pool attendant; joined the NSDAP in 1929; became SS-Untersturmführer in 1934 and SS-Obersturmführer in 1938.

10 Head of the Bebra police station.

11 A brand of solidified coconut fat.

go up the stairway at your place, in the other buildings even the staircases are gone, all of them probably just managed to temporarily escape with their lives, nobody knows where they have all gone; it is suspected that they are all in a concentration camp until a definitive solution has been found. Various Jewish women have gone insane; young Mrs Levi slit her wrists.¹² I saw only the Emanuels' former flat, but all the others are ravaged in the same way; the synagogue too is a pile of rubble, of course, the prayer books are flying around in the street.

I now spend much of my time in your apartment, because all the people are running around in the building; there is a great hustle and bustle from the attic to the cellar; the building has never seen so many people. That is why we brought all your silver back with us today, and the family pictures, some of the good household linens, the beautiful platter on the chest, your cash account and insurance books, and all the bacon and sausage. Then I closed the WC window and pantry window and locked the WC. All your keys are up here with us too. We just couldn't bring any more here right now because I don't know where I'd put it. We thought these are the most important things to begin with, because they can no longer be replaced. Mr Röse from the restaurant next door wants to buy the building; he asked us for the Emanuels' address, which we of course do not have. Now, I hope, Werner will sell the rest of the Jews' houses,¹³ because they no longer have any say in the matter, since the others have been sold mostly in Rotenburg at the prodding of the Jews, which has always annoyed me so much. You can thank God that you were not here, as you might have had a heart attack; the neighbours assured us that there was a dreadful din. Mrs N. is completely wiped out, and tears run down her face whenever one speaks to her. You must not come back yet either; even Mr Rex, doubtlessly a tough man who has already experienced quite a lot, as he has assured us, says that you must not return now under any circumstances. Everyone stopped me right after the first night and asked after you; most of them knew that you were away. Miss G. and Mrs N. wanted to ring us the first night, but then decided not to because you had told them that you planned to go on a trip, and we could not have done anything anyway, of course. And in fact, nothing happened to all your things and food provisions. The apples were taken only because they were in the front part of the cellar; they did not come until Monday afternoon, and everything happened the following night. They still haven't been unpacked; I don't know whether I should leave them down there, as everything is so precarious. The next two days we were unable to go into the building, as the police had boarded everything up with thick boards; now it is all open. Minna does not need to mop the stairs again any time soon; everything is white all the way to the top with flour that was trampled on, a dreadful mess inside and out. Even the trellises where the pretty blue flowers were entwined were not spared, and the stone pillars were knocked over, all the grating and the garage torn open, the car upended and smashed to pieces, also a big heap of rubble. Now you can get a rough picture of what it looks like, but you won't completely take it in until you have

12 Martha Levi, née Frank (b. 1902). She was raped by an SA man on the night of the pogrom; her husband, Leopold Levi (b. 1897), was deported to Buchenwald concentration camp. In the spring of 1939 the couple moved to Mannheim and from there were deported to the French internment camp at Gurs on 20 Oct. 1940 and to Auschwitz in August 1942. Neither husband nor wife survived.

13 Gerda Kappes hoped that her husband, as a lawyer, would be retained to help with the sale of the houses belonging to the Bebra Jews who had fled.

seen it. I hope everything will soon be in order again; it is estimated that it will take 3,000 marks to rebuild everything in the Emanuels' home alone. According to a cautious estimate, assets worth around 30,000 marks were burned. Now you also know why we are so glad and grateful that you are there in Kiel; this is certainly the hand of divine providence. I want to stop now, I'm all flushed, it is all still so upsetting, I could write a book. My mother was here visiting me on Wednesday; the same thing happened in Rotenburg – my father¹⁴ is quite beside himself, she told me, otherwise he would have come with her. Give my regards to the Stange family with sweet little Gerd; how I'd love to see him again. Warmest regards to you, and don't get into a fret, because everything is all right in your apartment, no reason at all to get upset.

Most affectionately yours,

Gerda

Please save the letter and confirm its arrival soon.¹⁵

14 Friedrich Wenderoth (1867–1939), lawyer; district court judge in Rotenburg an der Fulda, 7 km away; married to Clara Wenderoth, née Gundlach (1879–1966).

15 The last sentence was added by Werner Kappes, who in addition wrote his mother a short letter, not reproduced here, in which he confirmed the account given by his wife.