

Valentin Senger's account of a truly helpful policeman



Valentin Senger, born 1918 in Frankfurt am Main in a Jewish family of Russian origin, worked as a technical designer after training as a draughtsman. After the Second World War he became a journalist and worked first for the Sozialistische Volkszeitung and later for the Hessischer Rundfunk. Valentin Senger died in 1997 in Frankfurt am Main.

“Sometime during the summer of 1933 Police Sergeant Kaspar of the fourth district came to see us. This was nothing unusual; we’d been living on Kaiserhofstrasse for many years, and knew him well. It was customary in those days for a police sergeant to visit his “parishioners” on official business – when he needed some information or a signature or there was a form to be filled out. He usually waited outside on the landing, but this time he let Mama into the front room, which we’d let to the Jewish salesman, who was seldom at home. They closed the door behind them and whispered so softly I couldn’t understand a thing. After Kaspar left, Mama was terribly upset.

It wasn’t until much later that I found what he had told Mama so mysteriously. The Gestapo had instructed all the police districts to draw up lists of all persons whose religion had been entered as “Hebraic” in the police files. In this way they figured they could lay hands even on those Jews who did not belong to the Jewish Community. The police sergeant must have known that Mama and Papa had withdrawn from the Jewish community years before. Maybe she had told him. [At that time no one, not even Sergeant Kaspar, despite his concern for our welfare, suspected that those lists of Jews, which after the promulgation of the racial laws included all “half” and “quarter Jews”, were being compiled in preparation for the “final solution of the Jewish question”.]

After telling Mama about the list, Kaspar asked her if we were planning to leave Germany in the immediate future. Mama said we were not and explained quite plausibly that it took money to emigrate. [...]

Some days after his first visit, Police Sergeant Kaspar came back again, and again he conferred with Mama behind closed doors. He had made inquiries, he told her, and was sure that we’d have a hard time of it if our name was put on the list of the Jews. Rumours were going round

that the Jews would soon be moved into segregated neighbourhoods and made to pay much higher taxes. And other still severer measures were thought to be in the offing. But, the sergeant went on, we needn't worry, all this didn't affect us; he'd thought it over and finally decided not to put our name on the list of Jews. When Mama asked how he could manage that without getting himself into trouble, he explained that he had just made a little change in our registration card, he'd changed "Hebraic" to "Nonconformist". And he made it clear to Mama that she must never again put herself down as Jewish. Whenever she had to fill out an official form – and he knew that in our family it was always Mama who attended to this kind of thing – she must write "Nonconformist" or "None" in the "religion" space. Before he left he made it clear to mama that he too would be in trouble if it ever came out that our origins were questionable.

Why, the reader may ask, should Sergeant Kaspar have stuck his neck out for us? I honestly don't know. But the fact remains that he did. [...] But the police sergeant did not stop there. In 1935 when the so-called Nuremberg Laws – the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Safeguard of German Blood and German Honor – were promulgated and the propaganda machine was whipping up anti-Semitic feeling to fever pitch, there was the danger of the corrected card. What if an overzealous colleague noticed the correction and started investigating our family! So he simply destroyed the old card and made a new one. He never breathed a word to us about it to us. But when we had to renew our residence permit, Mama noticed the new card."

Source: Excerpt from Valentin Senger: No. 12. Kaiserhofstrasse. The story of an invisible Jew in Nazi Germany, New York 1980, p. 65-68.