

Rabbi Silverman asked me to say a few words on Kristallnacht. I was 14 at the time, living in a children's home after my mother's death. It was a large building with a synagogue on the top floor shared by the residents of a home for the elderly across the road.

Odd that it is, we children slept peacefully throughout the mayhem of the night and woke up to a different world. The prayer room in the boys' wing was utterly destroyed. Scrolls, books and furniture were one big mess on the floor. Considering that the complex was built around 1850-1860, it was a solid construction and the synagogue would not be ignited. Its ancient timbers smouldered and were doused by our staff after the perpetrators left.

Here I must mention 'a righteous Gentile'. The local police Sergeant arrived offering assistance if needed after seeing what was happening. We were not allowed to leave the building, so I did not see any of the ruined signs across the city.

For a teenager, life became normal again though restrictions had to be observed but we had known those all along. Hindsight set in years later. Is it possible to convey the fear and despondency Kristallnacht created in communities across Germany?

It happened 80 years ago to the day and the memory has not faded. I have been back in Berlin several times and watch the synagogue of my early childhood return to its original condition supporting a substantial congregation, who welcome me when I visit.