

LESSON: CHALLENGES OF ESCAPE, 1938–1941

Klaus Langer was a teenager in Gleiwitz, Germany. He began his **diary** after his bar mitzvah¹ and recorded the unfolding discrimination against the Jews of his town in the 1930s. In these excerpts, Klaus writes about his family's efforts to emigrate following Kristallnacht.

NOVEMBER 28, 1938

On November 23, Father came home and immediately began work on the emigration process. The only two countries to which Father's pension could be transferred were Chile and Palestine. By his calculation, his income would not be enough to make a living in Palestine and the question then arose whether he would be able to supplement his pension. There was also the question whether the Nazis would continue to send his pension abroad. As an amateur musician it was almost impossible to make a living in Palestine because of the many other Jewish musicians who had emigrated there. In Chile the situation was somewhat better and it would have been possible to live there on the pension ... Father had to give up hope for emigrating to Argentina. He is now hoping to get a business license for Palestine. It would be best if we could all go to Palestine.

DECEMBER 14, 1938

According to the new law, Jews are allowed to take only essentials with them when they emigrate. The new regulation requires rehabilitation to the German government for the destruction caused over Kristallnacht.

DECEMBER 19, 1938

Regarding the emigration of my parents, I have the following to report. First came two refusals from Argentina for lack of letters of credit. The rich uncle in America is unable to assume such a financial responsibility. We don't have an affidavit for the US. India requires firm employment there, or a contract. Father is now trying to make connections in India to obtain a contract. He also wrote to Peru and he was told to go to the Uruguayan consulate. Allegedly the Dominican Republic would take ten thousand Jews and provide them with visas. However, nothing further is known about that. It probably makes no sense to turn to them. However, with a Dominican Republic visa it is possible to get a half-year visa for Palestine. Shanghai also accepts Jews, even without a visa, but it's questionable how one can live there. The mail also brought no news from Palestine. We had submitted a request for 'commercial certification.'

JANUARY 5, 1939

My parents had to all but give up hope for South America. However, India is still an open possibility. If they can get there it would be very good. Their chances for emigrating to the US also are very slim because they have a very high waiting number, 25,000.

Klaus emigrated to Palestine, arriving in January 1940. However, his parents and grandmother were not able to emigrate from Germany. His mother died in Essen, Germany, of blood poisoning on September 8, 1941. His father was deported on April 21, 1942, to the Izbica Libelska camp. By the end of that year, the Nazis and their collaborators had murdered the Jews of Izbica, shooting some and deporting most of them to killing centers at Belzec and Sobibor. Klaus's father was among them. His grandmother was sent to Terezin on July 15, 1942, and only a few months later was deported to Minsk, where she died.

¹ Bar Mitzvah: A religious initiation ceremony of a Jewish boy who has reached the age of 13. It indicates that he is considered ready to observe religious precepts and take on the responsibilities inherent in communal worship.