



Martin Doerry, ed. *My Wounded Heart: The Life of Lilli Jahn, 1900-1944*. New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2004. 269 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58234-370-9.

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My Wounded Heart (originally *Mein verwundetes Herz*) tells the story of Lilli Jahn who was born in 1900 in Cologne into a middle-class Jewish family and who was murdered in Auschwitz in 1944. Most of the story is told through the correspondence between Lilli and her five children during her imprisonment. This is a finely edited, heart-breaking book that gives us intimate insights into the consequences of Nazi racial policies for one German family.

The book was edited by Lilli's grandson, Martin Doerry, deputy editor in chief of *Der Spiegel* and son of Lilli's oldest daughter Ilse, the most avid letter writer of the five children. Doerry also wrote the narrative portions of the book, which tell the story of Lilli's life before the Nazis came to power, connect the letters, and lucidly place Lilli's life in historical context. Doerry's writing is informative and clear. And while Doerry does not shy away from addressing the profoundly distressing aspects of the family history, he always remains somewhat understated and restrained, which curiously enough makes this story all the more heart-rending.

Lilli, raised in the tradition of the educated German middle class, was a prolific letter writer, a woman with broad intellectual interests, and a keen observer of Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. She was a physician at a

time when not many women worked in that profession, a mother of five children, and a Jewish woman married to a Protestant, also a physician. Lilli married Ernst Jahn in August 1926, and followed him to Immenhausen, a small town near Kassel. Initially, the two worked together in their practice, but the birth of five children in quick succession led Lilli to devote most of her time to motherhood. Ernst Jahn seems to have been relieved about this change to a traditional division of labor because he was ambivalent about his wife's professional activities.

The Nazi seizure of power changed Lilli's life irreversibly. Soon she was no longer permitted to work as a physician in her husband's practice. Separated by the marriage from her friends and family, Nazi policies increasingly confined Lilli's life to her children and husband. The once joyful, outgoing woman became apprehensive and reclusive. By 1934, she became very worried about the future of her children, labeled "half-Jews" under National Socialism. She investigated possibilities to emigrate with her family, but Ernst refused to leave because his practice was doing so well. When he divorced Lilli in 1942, after having a child with another woman, she was banished with her five children to an apartment in Kassel. As a divorcee, she lost her protection as a Jewish partner in a "mixed" marriage and was arrested in

1943 by the Gestapo and sent to the Breitenau Corrective Labor Camp.

Most of the letters in the book between Lilli and her children were written during this period. For the remainder of the war, her children virtually lived alone; her youngest daughter was three at the time of her arrest. Even though the children returned to their father's house after being bombed in Kassel, they maintained their own household, as they did not get along with their father's new wife. Fifteen-year-old Ilse became a substitute mother for her younger siblings. The children, particularly the older daughters, sent many letters to their mother, sometimes writing daily in the attempt to comfort her and themselves in their loneliness. They sent as many packages as possible to ease their mother's life in the labor camp. Lilli never let them know how much she really suffered. Lilli, too, wrote as often as possible, often having her letters smuggled out, as she was only officially allowed to write once a month. Before being deported to Auschwitz in March 1943, Lilli smuggled her children's letters back to them, probably through a wardress. Lilli's children received only one letter from their mother from Auschwitz, which she probably did not write herself. A few days after the children received this letter in June 1944, the Gestapo called Ernst Jahn's house to inform the

family that Lilli was dead.

When Lilli Jahn's son, Gerhard—who became a Social Democrat and a minister of justice in Willy Brandt's cabinet—died in October 1998, he left his sisters and their families several cardboard boxes containing some 250 letters that the children wrote to their mother in Breitenau. None of the sisters knew that Gerhard had saved them. In 1999, the daughters sat down together to read the letters, with no intention of publishing them. Doerry was asked to organize and copy them. Further research, however, unearthed more letters. Eventually more than 300 letters from Lilli, written between 1918 and 1944, were collected. None of the sisters had known that the others were in possession of some of Lilli's letters. Doerry observes that there was "an unspoken ban on asking questions" that was even felt by the grandchildren (p. vii). After 1999, Doerry felt ready to probe into his grandmother's life. He gathered all of Lilli's letters and those of her children and set out to tell her story.

My Wounded Heart, based on these letters, makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the Holocaust. It offers an intimate look at private life under Nazi rule. The book is a fascinating historical document—and a most unsettling personal story that made me simply want to howl.

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