

This book is of special interest to any parent of a child with PDD, OCD, autism, or other “special needs,” especially neurological needs. I could use *A Slant of Sun* in classes that address language acquisition, speech therapy, or the power of literacy. Potential readers include anyone interested in fine writing about one woman’s discovery of her deepest sources of strength. *A Slant of Sun* was a finalist for a National Book Award (U.S.) in 1998.

Before Deportation

Feiner, Herta.
Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

Reviewed by Ruth Nemzoff

Before Deportation by Herta Feiner contains eighty-five pages of letters from a German-Jewish mother living in Berlin to her half-Aryan daughters at boarding school in Gland, Switzerland. The letters cover the period January 1939 to December 1942. Amidst the trivia of daily concerns and the usual parental affectionate expression of love is a powerful description of pre-deportation Nazi-Germany, with its insidious erasure of freedoms and rights for Jews in Germany. The Nazi machinery left few aspects of life untouched. Their gradual encroachment in each sphere of life occurred in small increments, allowing the Jews to adapt to the changes. They manipulated this human capacity for adaptation and ensnared the Jews in their trap.

We learn, for example, that at first the Nazi government allowed the flow of mail; then they required a special stamp; next they limited the length of the letters; subsequently they limited the number of letters that Jews could send. Finally, they stopped mail delivery altogether. We learn that slowly the Jewish schools were diminished, first by forced moves to smaller quarters, then by staff reductions and, in time, by shortened school hours.

At first the spouses or parents of Aryans were protected. Finally, no one was protected. We see the effectiveness of the gradually tightening noose when this loving mother actually asks her daughters to return to Germany in the belief that their Aryan status could protect both mother and daughters.

Although this book is not as powerful or emotionally wrenching as Elie Weisel’s *Night*, its very ordinariness demonstrates the thorough and methodical way the Nazis were able to lure the Jews to their deaths. This book helps answer the question, “Why didn’t the Jews see what was happening?”