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Autobiography & Memoir

**Bitter Prerequisites: A Faculty for Survival from Nazi Terror**
William Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt
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For Walter Hirsch, escaping Hitler's wrath was more adventure than vital necessity. Hirsch, a young Jewish boy in 1933 Stuttgart, had "always wanted to go to America…always wanted to be a cowboy." His dream of traveling across the Atlantic was realized when he and his entire family quickly left Germany just as the early strains of virulent anti-Semitism began to show.

However, it was not the wish fulfillment he had envisioned. Thrown into a new culture, Hirsch was forced to find a new life and began to squelch the horrid memories of his childhood. He believed that "those who had not been through similar trauma would not understand or even be interested," in his story.

It is incredibly fortunate that William Kleine-Ahlbrandt was interested and chose to compile, in Bitter Prerequisites, the oral histories of twelve of his fellow Purdue professors, including Hirsch, who fled to America during Hitler's Third Reich. The interviews are highly personal and illuminate how "life as it is lived is fluid and not easy to compartmentalize." Each contributor is from a different locale, economic status, and "degree" of Jewish heritage. As the laws became stricter and the anti-Semitism more acceptable, it became apparent that any Jewish ancestry was a certain death sentence.

The experiences range from innocence lost: Joseph Haberer arriving at his school the day after Kristallnacht (the November 1938 burning and looting of Jewish synagogues and Jewish owned businesses) only to be rapidly removed and sent on the Kindertransport; to tragedy: Michael Golomb losing track of his parents as they were transported to Chelmo, a killing center northwest of Lodz.

Kleine-Ahlbrandt teaches history at Purdue University and has written several other books about Europe during the World Wars. This collection is straightforward and detailed. Even though Kleine-Ahlbrandt supports each interview with historical background information, it's as if the reader is privy to twelve diaries that are the secret, sometimes humorous, and

certainly painful stories of survival despite incredible odds.

*Kristin Putchinksi*