

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
Archives**

**Oral History Interviews of the
Kean College of New Jersey
Holocaust Resource Center**

**Interview with Walter Nachtigall
February 8, 1989
RG-50.002*0043**

PREFACE

On March 25, 1987, Walter Nachtigall was interviewed on videotape by Bernard Weinstein and Peppy Margolis on behalf of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The interview took place in Union, New Jersey and is part of the Research Institute Archives of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center created a summary and time-coded notes for the interview. The reader should bear in mind that these finding aids attempt to represent the spoken word in the recorded interview, yet have not necessarily been verified by the interviewee. The finding aids should not be used in place of the interview itself.

Rights to the interview are held by the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum houses a copy of the interview as a result of a contributing organization agreement with the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center. Details concerning the Museum's rights to use and reproduce the interview are contained in the contributing organization agreement.

Summary of the
Interview with Walter Nachtigall
February 8, 1989

Walter Nachtigall was born on February 2, 1931 in Vienna, Austria. He remembers the jubilation of the Austrians at the time of the Anschluss. Hidden Antisemitism became overt after the Nazis took over. The Nachtigall family's apartment was broken into and ransacked by the S.A. on the morning after Kristallnacht. Walter's father was taken away to Dachau concentration camp in Germany. The family then decided to send Walter and his sister to England to escape the Nazis. The children arrived in London, England, and took a train for Edinburgh, Scotland, where Walter stayed with the family of a Jewish doctor. When the doctor and his wife went on vacation, Walter was sent to stay with a Christian patient of the doctor in Dysart, Scotland. Jimmy and Isa Salmond were very good to Walter and loved him as one of their own. In order to avoid an evacuation of all refugees who might be spies, Walter stayed with the Salmonds through the summer of 1939.

Walter's father was released from Dachau and his parents came to Great Britain to be close to their children. They began working as domestics in Edinburgh. The village of Dysart took up a collection so that Walter could visit his parents. Relatives in the United States made arrangements for the Nachtigalls to immigrate before the end of 1939. After arriving in the United States, Walter kept in contact with the Salmonds and visited them in Scotland in the late 1950's. He considers them to be his Scottish family.

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**Time-coded notes of the
Interview with Walter Nachtigall
February 8, 1989**

01:00:00

Walter Nachtigall has lived in the United States since 1939. Walter came to the United States when he was nine years old. He was born in the Jewish section of Vienna. Walter only knew the block that he lived on. His father had a storefront leather business. Walter attended Talmud Torah and had a happy home life. He remembers the Anschluss being greeted with jubilation. Walter looked out of the window and saw huge Nazi banners from every building, including his own. Despite the fact that Walter's grandmother was the landlady, the superintendent, an ardent Nazi, unfurled a Nazi flag.

01:04:00

Although there probably was always covert Antisemitism before the Anschluss, it was now overt. Members of the Hitler Youth could assault and humiliate an orthodox Jew. Walter couldn't comprehend this. Although he was only eight years old, he felt fear without being personally threatened. The fear came from not knowing.

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The height of all of this activity came on Kristallnacht. Walter did not know the politics of the day, but apparently his older brother was aware that something was amiss. The morning after Kristallnacht, his apartment was broken into. Walter's brother was hiding in the home of a girlfriend. The S.A. broke into the family's apartment. They were in their late teens or early 20's. Walter's father recognized three of them.

01:10:00

The S.A. humiliated Walter's parents and ransacked the apartment. They threw the mattress, the furniture, and other things down to people on the street. Walter's father was taken to Dachau concentration camp in Germany. No one knew what was happening. In the course of the day they heard fire engines. They saw a synagogue burning. The firemen attached hoses to the hydrants, but the S.S. would not let them turn the water on.

01:13:00

The agenda of the Nazis was to allow things to happen, to destroy Jewish edifices, businesses, and synagogues. These actions were not spontaneous. The assassination of Ernst von Rath (councilor to the German embassy in Paris) was only the trigger that set things off.

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In the weeks and months that followed, the family got occasional messages from Walter's father in Dachau. The messages were censored, but they knew he was alive. Walter's mother filled out forms and applications to get his father released. There was a concerted effort to evacuate Jewish children from Germany and Austria.

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01:19:00

Walter and his sister were told by their parents that they were going on a trip. Walter didn't understand. His parents were emotional at the station. The children cried. There was laughing, crying, a very difficult farewell. The train was filled with children. Early in the morning the train reached a railroad siding. After 12 or more hours, (it was five o'clock in the morning), they arrived in Holland. Dutch people brought them food. The children on the train sang "We're thanking all the Dutch people."

01:22:00

At the disembarkation point, Walter had to go to a table where the Jewish community of London, England, helped the children with their reassignments. Walter and his sister were assigned to Edinburgh, Scotland. His sister knew a little English.

01:25:00

The trip from London to Edinburgh took six or seven hours. Walter and his sister were picked up by two sets of Jewish families. Walter stayed with a physician's family. He slept on a cot. The experience was cold and unpleasant. Walter felt a lack of warmth and a sense of dislocation.

01:28:00

The host family had an older son who was a medical student. The physician performed some medical services for a Christian family. The doctor and his wife wanted to go on vacation. The Christian family, who lived in the country, was willing to provide a home for Walter. They lived in the fishing community of Dysart, Scotland. Jimmy and Isa Salmond were the parents. They had two teenage children.

01:31:00

Jimmy was a truck driver. It was pleasant there. Walter remembers going to the cinema with Jimmy and being held by the hand. Walter asked to stay a second and even a third week. During that third week, an evacuation was taking place of refugees who might be spies. This was an overreaction. There was some concern that Walter might be evacuated again. Jimmy refused to let the authorities evacuate Walter again.

01:34:00

Jimmy decided to give Walter a home. All of this occurred during the summer of 1939. The teacher who taught children Walter's age didn't know German, so he was put in another grade. Walter was a novelty in the town because no one had ever known Jews living there. Mae and Bill, the Salmond children became his friends.

01:37:00

Walter's presence created a unique awareness of what they were reading in the newspapers. While all of this was happening, Walter's father got out of Dachau. Jews were allowed to leave if a country would take them in. Walter's parents went to London and then Scotland. His father was interned on the Isle of Man. Walter's brother lived in southern England. His parents ultimately came to Edinburgh and worked as domestics.

01:40:00

The public school teacher and some others gave Walter the money to visit his parents. The whole community pitched in to help him. Walter got Christmas presents in abundance. He couldn't understand what was happening.

01:43:00

Walter's father was concerned about the possibility that Walter would be converted to Christianity. Walter went to church with the host family. What Walter's father didn't know was that the minister would take Walter into his office every Sunday after church and had him recite the Shema.

01:46:00

Walter's father had a large number of cousins in America, but they did not know Walter. His relatives in the United States had

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to sign an affidavit that any refugees that they took on would not be a burden to the state. This was after the Great Depression, and it was not easy to get such an affidavit. Walter's cousin, Abe Rosmarin, pleaded with Walter's other relatives. Walter and his family finally got together. Walter's brother also made it to the United States.

01:49:00

It was hard to part from the Salmonds, but they acknowledged that Walter already had parents. Walter always promised that he would come back. In the late 1950s, he returned to Scotland for a reunion. Walter has had constant contact with the family, although both parents are dead. Bill and Mae's families are his Scottish mishpachah (family).

01:52:00

Walter encouraged Mae to put down her thoughts of earlier years. In the second part of the tape, Walter reads portions of her letter. She recapitulated that her family had great love to give and thought that everyone loved Walter. Walter, in turn, admired Jimmy and said that he was so big that he could fight Hitler. Walter recalls the pillowcases that Jimmy filled with presents at Christmastime.

01:55:00

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Because Germany was so far away, they had no knowledge of what was happening. Walter became their catalyst to understanding. They empathized with Walter's plight as well as the plight of the Jews. The love Walter has for this family has no bounds.