

Questions to Consider When Viewing Video

1. How old was Walter at the time of Kristallnacht?
2. What happened to him when he tried to attend school after Kristallnacht?
3. As he left the school, what were the Nazis doing to some of the men in the town?
4. What was the Kindertransport?
5. How was Walter able to get on the Kindertransport? Where was he taken?
6. How was his father lucky during this time?
7. Where and how were Walter and his father able to be reunited?
8. How long had Walter's family actually lived in Germany?
9. What did Walter do once he came to the United States?
10. How does Walter feel about forgiving the Nazis for what happened?

Holocaust Survivor

Walter Wertheim

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*"I never want to forget
that people gave up their homes
and their privacy to take us in."*

- Walter Wertheim

Face to Face
A Holocaust Education Program at
Congregation Shaarey Tikvah
Beachwood, Ohio

Walter Wertheim was born in Mönchengladbach, Germany, in 1925. His family had lived in the same area of Germany for more than 300 years. Walter's mother was the eighth generation of her family to be born in the town where she was raised.

Walter was 13 years old at the time of Kristallnacht, a night of organized violence against Jews, synagogues, and Jewish-owned businesses. His mother had died of natural causes two years previously. On that morning, Walter's father was out of town on a business trip. Walter was at home with a caretaker. He walked to his school as usual. When Walter got to his classroom, his teacher said he "temporarily" could not go to school.

As Walter left the school, he noticed a lot of activity at the local jail next door to the school. Later he learned that local Jewish men were being rounded up arbitrarily and sent to jail.

Walter's father called and told him to go to Cologne, a nearby larger city, where they felt safer. After a few days they felt safe coming home to Mönchengladbach.

Now there was a problem: Walter still couldn't go to school. His father organized tutoring sessions for Walter and some of his friends. Later Walter's father arranged for him to attend the Jewish high school in Cologne for a few months.

Walter's father made arrangements for him to leave Germany and go on the Kindertransport to England, where he would be safe. The Kindertransport was a program that took children to England without their parents. Of about 10,000 Jewish children who were sent to England, 80 percent never saw their parents again.

Walter left Germany in May, 1939, at 13, on special trains to Holland and an overnight boat trip to England. There Walter was assigned to several different foster families. Some families worked out better than others, but he was not able to go to school in England.

In the meantime, Walter's father had been able to leave Germany, even though the war had already started. Walter's father moved to the United States, which had not yet entered the war. In June, 1940, when Walter was 15 years old, he left England to meet his father in New York.

In New York Walter went back to high school and managed to graduate at the age of 16. At 18 he enlisted in the U.S. Army, and, after the war, he attended college and law school.

Walter always remembers three close friends who did not survive the Holocaust because their parents did not have the foresight that his own father had. He also lost several members of his extended family. Out of the 613 Jews from his hometown, only about 12 survived.