

Bob Behr



Born March 1, 1922, in Berlin, Germany

Robert (Bob) Behr was born on March 1, 1922 in Berlin, Germany to Alfred and Lilly Behr. Alfred was a commercial real estate agent and Lilly managed their household. Robert's parents divorced when he was young, and his mother remarried a local physician, Dr. Alfred Hamburger. Robert lived with his mother and step-father, seeing his father infrequently.

First Person
Today at 1:00pm
Doors open at 12:45pm

Following the Nazi assumption of power in January 1933, the family became subject to Hitler's Nuremberg Laws and other antisemitic legislation despite the fact that the Behrs were staunch German patriots; both Robert's father and stepfather were World War I veterans. In 1935, German Jews were stripped of their citizenship and made to carry identity papers with new Jewish middle names: Israel for men and Sarah for women. Jewish children were no longer allowed to attend public school. In 1937 Robert was fortunate to be able to attend a German-Jewish boarding school in Sweden until the Nazi government restricted the exchange of German currency into Swedish Kroners. The German families could no longer pay tuition, forcing the school to close. The Swedish Jewish community offered to keep the children in Stockholm until it was safe to return to Germany, but Robert's mother insisted that he return to Berlin.



During *Kristallnacht* on November 9-10, 1938, Robert's father was arrested and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. He was released and left for Cuba before immigrating to the United States. Robert also hoped to leave for the United States but could not secure an affidavit. On November 29, 1938, Robert and his parents were evicted from their apartment. With help from the Jewish Community Service, they found two rooms in an elderly Jewish woman's apartment. The family lived there until 1942 when Lilly and Alfred Hamburger were arrested by the Gestapo after helping a friend escape to neutral Switzerland. Robert was arrested two days later, and the family was deported to Theresienstadt where Lilly worked in the laundry and Dr. Hamburger in the hospital. Robert transported bodies for burial. He was later placed on a road crew laying railroad tracks to and from the camp until a Czech friend found him work in the camp's kitchen.

Theresienstadt quickly became overcrowded, and the Gestapo began deporting the prisoners to Auschwitz. To protect his parents from deportation in early 1944, Robert volunteered to work on the new SS headquarters at Wulkow, a satellite camp of Theresienstadt. During one of the coldest winters of the century, supply problems stalled their work. In order to keep the prisoners busy, they were given buckets and brushes and told to wash the trees! They returned to Theresienstadt in January 1945, and Robert was reunited with his parents. He worked in the camp kitchen until the camp was liberated by the Soviet Army on May 5, 1945.

In 1947, Robert immigrated to the United States where he enlisted in the United States Army, hoping to be assigned to Berlin so he could care for his mother. His German language fluency secured him a transfer to Berlin where he interrogated former Nazi personnel. Robert left the Army in 1952 and joined the United States Air Force civil service in Dayton, Ohio working as an intelligence officer. He retired in 1988 after 39 years of government service. Robert earned both a Bachelors and a Masters degree in Modern European History and became an adjunct professor at Sinclair College. He has been a volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum since 2001.

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