

**CH. 3: PREWAR NAZI GERMANY**

**IN**

**THE HOLOCAUST**

**A NORTH CAROLINA TEACHER'S RESOURCE**

**FEATURING THE NARRATIVES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS**  
**===== WHO BECAME NORTH CAROLINA RESIDENTS =====**

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North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

# III ■ PREWAR NAZI GERMANY ■

## OVERVIEW

■ *"There was no resistance whatsoever. Hitler was welcomed with open arms."*

—Jack Hoffmann

■ *"Now it needs to be told. Because there are people who say it never happened, and there are also people today, if you listen to them carefully, who are trying to justify what happened."*

—Walter Falk

Seizure of power gave the Nazis enormous control over every aspect of German life. The Nazis could use the machinery of government—the police, courts, schools, newspapers and radio—to implement their racist beliefs. Jews, who made up less than one percent of the total population in 1933, were the principal target of this attack, but the Roma (Gypsies) and the handicapped were also singled out for persecution because they were seen as a biological threat to the purity of the Aryan race. The Nazis blamed the Jews for Germany's defeat in World War I, its economic problems, and for the spread of communist parties throughout Europe.

### GERMANS ACCEPT ANTI-JEWISH PROPAGANDA

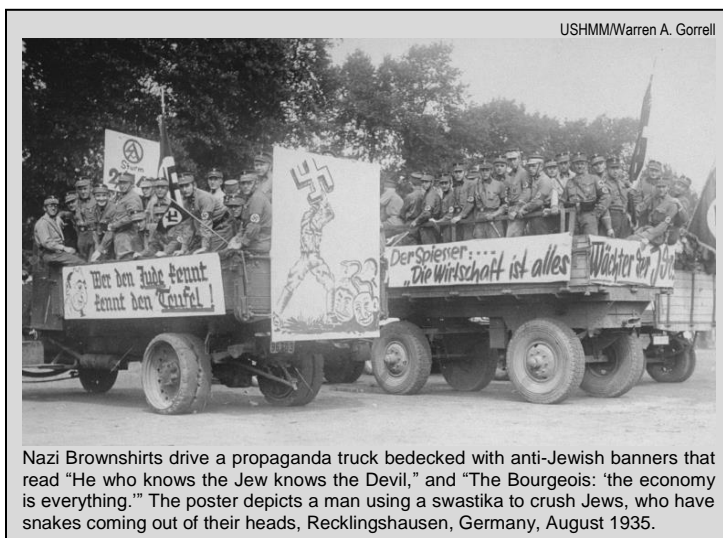
As Hitler raged against the Jews, he accused them of dominating Germany's economic and political life despite strong evidence to the contrary. In 1925 Jews made up less than five percent of officials in the German government, including the judicial system. Yet Hitler's propaganda machine inflated this number to 50 percent and then 62 percent. By 1930, less than eight percent of the directors of German banking companies were Jewish. In 1932, Germany's 85 major newspapers had fewer than 10 Jewish editors. Yet many Germans believed the Nazi

claim that Jews controlled the nation's financial system and its press. The Nazis skillfully used propaganda to create the public perception that Jews were a devious political, economic, and social threat to the nation, justifying Hitler's violent persecution of them.

In April 1933, soon after gaining power, Hitler began to make discrimination against Jews government policy. All non-Aryans were expelled from the civil service. A non-Aryan was defined as anyone who had Jewish parents or two or more Jewish grandparents. In this same year the government called for a one-day general boycott of all Jewish-owned businesses and passed laws excluding Jews from journalism, radio, farming, teaching, the theater, and films. At the same time, government contracts with Jewish businesses were cancelled.

### NUREMBERG LAWS

In 1934, Jews were dismissed from the army. They were excluded from the stock exchange, law, medicine, and business. But it was the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 that took away the citizenship of Jews born in Germany, labeling them "subhuman." These laws defined Jews not by their religion, but by the religious affiliation of their grandparents. These laws became the backbone of the Nazi attack on Jews up to 1939. Over time some 14



supplementary decrees were issued which served as the basis for excluding Jews from professions like medicine and law, from serving as patent attorneys or tax advisors, and for limiting their business activities. With these laws Hitler officially made anti-Semitism a part of Germany's basic legal code.

Under these laws, marriage between Jews and Aryans was forbidden. Jews were not to display the German flag and could not employ servants under 45 years of age. These laws created a climate in which Jews were viewed as inferior people. The systematic removal of Jews from contact with their neighbors made it easier for Germans to think of Jews as less human or different.

German Jews lost their political rights. Restrictions were reinforced by identification documents. German passports were stamped with a capital "J" or the word *Jude*. All Jewish people had to have a recognizable Jewish name. Jewish men had to use the middle name "Israel," Jewish women the middle name "Sarah." These names had to be recorded on all birth and marriage certificates.

By 1939 the Nazis had seized Jewish businesses and properties or forced Jews to sell their businesses at rock bottom prices. Jewish children could no longer go to public schools, theaters, or movie houses. Hotels were closed to Jews and in some places Jews were prohibited from living or even walking in certain sections of German towns.

**T-4 PROGRAM** The Nazis also began the persecution of other groups viewed as racially inferior. Between 1933 and 1935, the Nazis passed laws creating involuntary sterilization programs aimed at reducing the number of genetically "inferior" Germans. Targets of these programs included over 300,000 mentally or physically disabled people. A law passed on July 14, 1933, made sterilization compulsory for people with congenital mental defects, schizophrenia, manic-depressive illness, hereditary epilepsy, and severe alcoholism. This law also included the blind and the deaf, even those who became deaf or blind from such illnesses as scarlet fever or from accidents.



When Hitler started the war in 1939, he ordered the elimination of the mentally handicapped because they were "useless eaters." The so-called T-4 program, headquartered in Berlin's Tiergartenstrasse 4, took the handicapped to extermination centers and gassed them with carbon monoxide. In 1941, public outcry against this program led the Germans to continue it with much greater secrecy. Before August 1941 about 100,000 people were killed by the Nazis through the T-4 program. By the end of the war another 100,000 were murdered in this way. These men and women, along with Jews and Roma (Gypsies), were seen as a biological threat to the purity of the German Aryan race that had to be exterminated.

Many of Germany's 30,000 Roma were also sterilized and prohibited from marrying Germans. They were considered by the Nazis to be racially impure and mentally defective. Later they would be condemned by the Nazis to the same fate as Jews—total annihilation. Over half a million Roma were murdered by the Germans in gas chambers, "medical" experiments, and

random killings. Homosexuals, mostly males, were another target of Nazi persecution. They were often given the choice of sterilization, castration, or imprisonment in a concentration camp where they were forced to wear a pink triangle. Children of mixed African and German racial background were also targeted for sterilization. Some of these children were offspring of German women and African soldiers in the French army stationed by the French in the Rhineland after World War I. These children were taken from schools or streets and sterilized, often without anesthesia. Under a 1933 statute, the “Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Defects,” these sterilizations were completely legal.

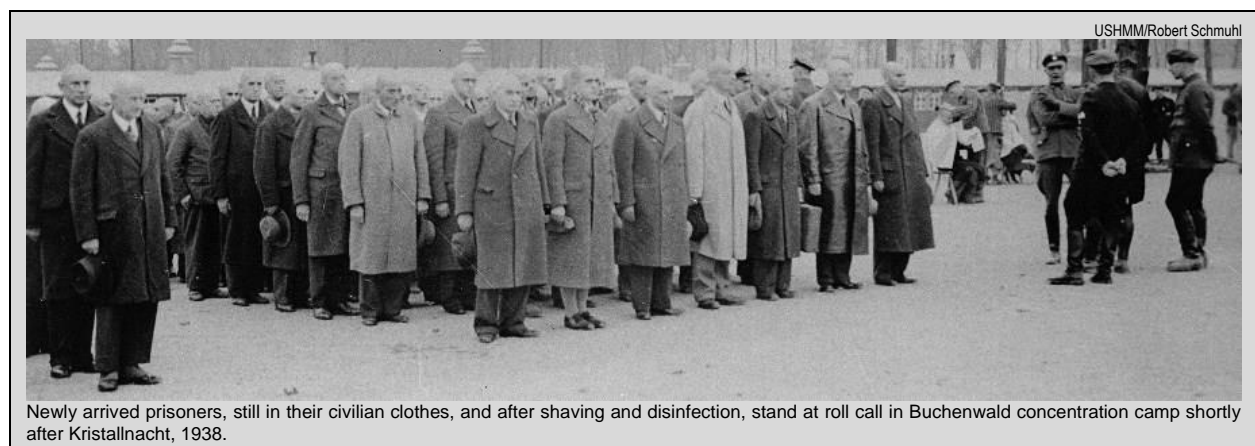
**JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES** Jehovah’s Witnesses were singled out for abuse because they were pacifists. They refused to swear an oath to the state or serve in the German army, and they urged others to act as they did. In addition, they would not salute the Nazi flag or say “Heil Hitler.” Many Witnesses lost jobs and some went to prisons and concentration camps in Germany or had their children taken from them and sent to orphanages.

**SS GAINS POWER** Hitler’s position was challenged from within the Nazi party by the SA, the abbreviation for the German term for storm troopers. Also called brownshirts, they were Hitler’s private army run by Ernst Roehm. In 1934 Hitler ordered a purge of the SA by the SS, the elite group of soldiers who served as his personal bodyguard. The Night of Long Knives ended any challenge to Hitler’s position of power. Once the SS state was created, resistance to the Nazi regime was destroyed. Communists, Catholics, Jews, intellectuals, and others were the targets of the Gestapo (secret police).

**FIRST CONCENTRATION CAMP** The SS soon took over from the SA the responsibility for setting up concentration camps throughout Germany. Anyone suspected of disloyalty or disobedience could be sent there. The first concentration camp opened in March 1933 at Dachau, close to Munich. It was built to hold political dissenters and “enemies of the state.” No charges had to be filed against the detainees; no warrant for their arrest was necessary, no real evidence was required.

**PREPARING FOR WAR** Hitler also pursued his plans for total war and European domination. He reintroduced the military draft, in violation of the Versailles Treaty. In 1936 his troops reoccupied the Rhineland, and he signed an agreement with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini to establish the Rome-Berlin Axis.

**NIGHT OF BROKEN GLASS: KRISTALLNACHT** On the night of November 9-10, 1938, the Nazis carried out what the German press called a “spontaneous demonstration” against Jewish property, synagogues, and people. Dr. Josef Goebbels, the propaganda minister, claimed the demonstration was in reaction to the shooting of a lower-level diplomat at the German embassy in Paris (a young Jewish man had attempted to assassinate the official because his father had



been deported to Poland). Throughout Germany, fires and bombs were used to destroy synagogues and shops. Store windows were shattered, leaving broken glass everywhere. By the time it ended, nearly 100 people had been killed and almost 30,000 had been arrested. That night became known as the Night of Broken Glass, or Kristallnacht. German documents found later showed that Kristallnacht had been carefully planned weeks in advance by the Nazis.

Even before Kristallnacht, many Jews in Germany and Austria had sought to escape. Between 1933 and 1939, about half the German Jewish population succeeded in finding refuge in other countries. More than two thirds of Austrian Jews fled the country as well. Some found safety in Palestine. Others went to China which did not require an entry visa. Latin American nations admitted some Jews as well. Many believed mistakenly that they would be safe in France, Holland, and other western European nations. Particularly because of the worldwide economic depression, public opinion in almost all countries was overwhelmingly opposed to immigration of any kind. The United States, Canada, and Britain maintained their limits on immigrants. Many Jews who remained under Nazi rule in Germany or Austria did so only because they could not get visas or sponsors in host countries or lacked the money needed to emigrate.

In March 1938, German troops marched into Austria and met no resistance. Austria became a part of greater Germany. This Anschluss, or uniting, although a violation of the Treaty of Versailles, would be justified by provisions of the treaty that stated that all people of one nationality had the right to live under one government. Hitler next seized the Sudetenland, an area in western Czechoslovakia where many Germans lived. For a short time he persuaded the British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, and the French Premier Edouard Daladier, that he was right in doing so. But when he invaded and occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia, no justifications could be found.

**WORLD WAR II BEGINS** Poland would be next. On September 1, 1939, German forces, spearheaded by tanks and bombers, marched into Poland and crushed all organized resistance. Britain and France declared war against Germany on September 3, 1939, and the world was once again at war.




USHMM/Charles & Herma Ellenbogen Barber

AMERIKANISCHES GENERALKONSULAT WIEN, DEUTSCHLAND

Herrn - Frau - Fräulein      Trost    Josef, Alice, Dorrit,



Erika,

Unter Bezugnahme auf den hier eingereichten, von Ihnen ausgefüllten Fragebogen, enthaltend Ihr Ansuchen um Vormerkung zwecks Einwanderung in die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika, wird Ihnen mitgeteilt, daß Sie unter dem Datum des SEP 15 1938 1938 auf der deutschen Warteliste unter Vormerknummer 47291 47294 eingetragen sind.

 Sie werden rechtzeitig verständigt werden, wann Ihre Nummer auf der Warteliste an die Reihe gekommen ist. Dieses Schriftstück ist sorgfältig aufzubewahren. Die Vormerknummer ist nicht die Quotennummer.

Notice sent to a Jewish family in Austria by the U.S. consulate in Vienna notifying them of their placement on the waiting list for visas to emigrate to the U.S., issued Sept. 15, 1938. There are over 47,000 applicants on the list ahead of them.

USHMM/Stadtarchiv Aachen

The synagogue of Aachen, Germany, before and after Kristallnacht

## ONLINE RESOURCES

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### ■ Resources from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

- ♦ Why Did Germans Vote for the Nazi Party? (lesson)  
[www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans/why-did-germans-vote-for-the-nazi-party](http://www.ushmm.org/educators/lesson-plans/why-did-germans-vote-for-the-nazi-party)
- ♦ Videos in series The Path to Nazi Genocide
  - Building a National Community, 1933-1936 (6:55) [www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide/chapter-2/building-a-national-community-1933-1936](http://www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide/chapter-2/building-a-national-community-1933-1936)
  - From Citizens to Outcasts, 1933-1938 (7:29) [www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide/chapter-3/from-citizens-to-outcasts-1933-1938](http://www.ushmm.org/learn/introduction-to-the-holocaust/path-to-nazi-genocide/chapter-3/from-citizens-to-outcasts-1933-1938)
- ♦ State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda [www.ushmm.org/propaganda/](http://www.ushmm.org/propaganda/)
- ♦ Anti-Semitic Legislation [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitic-legislation-1933-1939](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/antisemitic-legislation-1933-1939)
- ♦ Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race [www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/deadly-medicine-creating-the-master-race](http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/deadly-medicine-creating-the-master-race)
- ♦ Nazi Racial Ideology [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/victims-of-the-nazi-era-nazi-racial-ideology](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/victims-of-the-nazi-era-nazi-racial-ideology)
- ♦ Euthanasia Program [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/euthanasia-program](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/euthanasia-program)
- ♦ Murder of the Handicapped (T-4 Program) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-murder-of-the-handicapped](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-murder-of-the-handicapped)
- ♦ Nazi Persecution of Homosexuals, 1933-1945 [www.ushmm.org/exhibition/persecution-of-homosexuals/](http://www.ushmm.org/exhibition/persecution-of-homosexuals/)
- ♦ Nazi Olympics, Berlin, 1936 [www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/nazi-olympics-berlin-1936](http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/nazi-olympics-berlin-1936)
- ♦ Nazi anti-Jewish boycott, 1933 (archival footage: 1:27) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/nazi-anti-jewish-boycott](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/nazi-anti-jewish-boycott)
- ♦ U.S. condemnation of Kristallnacht (archival footage: 1:05) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/us-condemnation-of-kristallnacht](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/us-condemnation-of-kristallnacht)

### ■ Lessons from Facing History and Ourselves

- ♦ The Rise of the Nazi Party [www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/rise-nazi-party](http://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/rise-nazi-party)
- ♦ Dismantling Democracy [www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/dismantling-democracy](http://www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/teaching-holocaust-and-human-behavior/dismantling-democracy)
- ♦ Exploring Nazi Propaganda and the Hitler Youth Movement  
[www.facinghistory.org/for-educators/educator-resources/lessons-and-units/exploring-nazi-propaganda-and-hitler-youth](http://www.facinghistory.org/for-educators/educator-resources/lessons-and-units/exploring-nazi-propaganda-and-hitler-youth)

### ■ SEE the online Holocaust teaching resources recommended by North Carolina Holocaust educators. ■

[www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/holocaust-council/resources/teachingresources.pdf](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/holocaust-council/resources/teachingresources.pdf)



Access the valuable teaching resources of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at [www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust](http://www.ushmm.org/educators/teaching-about-the-holocaust). The museum's offerings include lesson plans, teaching guidelines, online activities, interactive maps, audio and video collections, the *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, and other exemplary classroom resources.

## LESSON ■ PREWAR NAZI GERMANY

- **Narrative: Walter Escapes at Age 12**
- **Narrative: Jack Escapes at Age 14**

As we read in the previous chapter, some Jews in the early 1930s did not imagine that Nazism would present a lethal threat to them in just a few years. This changed with the night of November 9-10, 1938—the explosion of anti-Semitic violence known as Kristallnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass.” In Germany and Nazi-occupied territory, thousands of Jewish businesses were attacked and looted. Over 200 synagogues and Jewish cemeteries were destroyed. Jews were beaten in the streets—about 100 were killed. And 30,000 Jewish men were rounded up and sent to detention camps.

The threat was now clear. Jews lined up at nations’ embassies to get exit visas, but the process time was long and the entry quotas low. Jews fled through forests and mountains to cross borders into non-Nazi-controlled nations, but they risked arrest, imprisonment, and deportation back to Nazi territory.

For desperate parents, one refuge emerged for their children—Kindertransport (children’s transport). Soon after Kristallnacht, a group of British, Jewish, and Quaker leaders convinced the British government to admit refugee children under 17 from Nazi-controlled countries. The first group of children arrived in December 1938, and the last just before the outbreak of war in September 1939. (A last transport organized by another group in the Netherlands arrived in May 1940.) The children lived with families or in camps, hostels, or children’s institutions. About 10,000 children, mostly Jewish, were saved from Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Most of them never saw their parents again. And their parents, when they sent them off, knew they would likely never see their children again.

The North Carolina survivors whose narratives are presented here both witnessed Kristallnacht and were then sent by their parents to England through Kindertransport.

- ♦ **Walter Falk** was 11 in Germany when the apartment he and his mother lived in was ransacked on Kristallnacht, and they left to live with her mother. In 1939, when Walter was 12, his mother sent him to England via Kindertransport. He settled in Greensboro in 1960.
- ♦ **Jack Hoffmann** was 14 when he witnessed Kristallnacht in Austria, which the Nazis had taken over earlier that year. Seven months later his parents sent him to England via Kindertransport. He settled in Greensboro in 1997.

Have students consider these questions as they read the narratives.

1. How did Nazi control affect Walter and Jack’s treatment as Jewish boys in public schools?
2. Under Nazi control, what happened to the apartments they lived in?
3. What examples does Jack give with his statement about the response of non-Jewish Austrians to Hitler’s takeover: *“There was no resistance whatsoever. Hitler was welcomed with open arms.”*
4. What did Walter and Jack witness on Kristallnacht? What did they experience personally?
5. How do you think you would have reacted at age 11 or 14?
6. After Kristallnacht, how were they treated by German and Austrian non-Jews?
7. What experience led Walter to write *“So he was a good Nazi, if there is such a thing.”*
8. How does Jack describe the ocean voyage from England to the United States, when he was 16? How does it differ from your sense of an ocean voyage?

9. How did Jack and his family respond to being reunited in the United States? What happened to the rest of his family in Europe?
10. How did Walter find out how his mother died during the Holocaust? How did he honor her in Greensboro?
11. Read or view the survivor testimonies about Kristallnacht from Centropa (15 brief excerpts) or the Shoah Foundation (six video clips). Compare the survivors' experiences with those of Walter and Jack. (See Online Resources below.)
12. Read the survivor testimonies about Kindertransport from the *Guardian*. Compare the survivors' experiences with those of Walter and Jack. (See Online Resources below.)
13. Choose one of these statements and use it as the basis for an essay on the importance of Holocaust awareness and education in the U.S. today, especially as the number of Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses is decreasing. Begin the essay with the statement and refer to it throughout your essay.
  - ♦ Jack Hoffmann [who arrived in the U.S. in 1940 at age 16]: *"The whole idea of being in America was something that was difficult for us to imagine. We came from a country that was at war. To be in America, to be in a country that was not threatened, as such, was just unbelievable."*
  - ♦ Walter Falk: *"It's just recently [1980s] that I could talk about it. I would never have talked about the Holocaust during the 1940s and 1950s . . . It was too fresh. But now it needs to be told. Because there are people who say it never happened, and there are also people today, if you listen to them carefully, who are trying to justify what happened."*



## ONLINE RESOURCES

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### ■ Kristallnacht

- ♦ Kristallnacht (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kristallnacht)
- ♦ Remembering the Night of Broken Glass (Centropa) [november1938.centropa.org/](http://november1938.centropa.org/)
- ♦ Remembering Kristallnacht: video with survivor testimonies, 25:56 (USC Shoah Foundation) [sfi.usc.edu/exhibits/remembering-kristallnacht](http://sfi.usc.edu/exhibits/remembering-kristallnacht)
- ♦ Documents required to obtain a visa to the U.S. (USHMM) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documents-required-to-obtain-a-visa](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/documents-required-to-obtain-a-visa)

### ■ Kindertransport

- ♦ Kindertransport (USHMM) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kindertransport-1938-40](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/kindertransport-1938-40)
- ♦ Kindertransport History (Kindertransport Assn.) [www.kindertransport.org/history.htm](http://www.kindertransport.org/history.htm)
- ♦ Kindertransport (Natl. Archives, UK) [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/kindertransport/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/kindertransport/)
- ♦ Kindertransport (BBC News) [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23032023](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23032023)
- ♦ "The Kindertransport children 80 years on," six survivors' experiences, *The Guardian* (UK), Nov. 6, 2018 [www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/06/the-kindertransport-children-80-years-on-we-thought-we-were-going-on-an-adventure](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/06/the-kindertransport-children-80-years-on-we-thought-we-were-going-on-an-adventure)

### ***"Translate statistics into people."***

In its guidelines for teaching about the Holocaust (see Supplemental Materials), the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum recommends using first-person accounts of survivors

*"precisely because they portray people in the fullness of their lives and not just as victims; [they] add individual voices to a collective experience and help students make meaning out of the statistics."*



## ■ PREWAR NAZI GERMANY ■

### WALTER ESCAPES AT AGE 12

*Born in 1927 in Germany, Walter Falk and his widowed mother lived in the city of Karlsruhe, which had a strong Jewish community. By the time Walter entered public school, Hitler had taken power and the Nazis were instituting their harsh anti-Jewish policies. After the Nazi-ordered mob violence of Kristallnacht in 1938, Walter escaped to England through the Kindertransport program.*

I went to public school like everyone else in Karlsruhe. I was not permitted to say “Heil Hitler” or wear a uniform. This set me apart from the rest of my classmates. I had to attend school parades and listen to propaganda speeches. The attitude towards Jews became worse as time went on. The other students were told not to socialize with Jews. The teachers were not supposed to speak to Jewish parents. In 1937, the Jewish children were separated from other German children, and we were placed into a school for handicapped children, with the Jewish kids on one side of the building and the handicapped children on the other side.

*On the night of November 9-10, 1938, the Nazis unleashed the violence of Kristallnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass.” They destroyed 257 synagogues, desecrated Jewish cemeteries, shattered the windows and looted over 7,000 Jewish businesses, and beat up countless Jews on the streets. About 100 Jews were killed and up to 30,000 Jewish men were arrested.*

My mother and I lived in an apartment and we didn’t know what was going on. The first thing I noticed as I went to school that morning was that the Jewish shoe store downstairs had all its windows smashed. The glass and shoes were all over the street. I went off to school, and the



first thing we were told in school was that the teacher would be late because the synagogue was burning and that the teacher, a religious man, had gone over to the synagogue to save the Torah,\* which he did. He brought it out of the burning synagogue, I was told, and then came over to school. Then some plainclothesmen, I guess they were from the Gestapo, came and took the teacher and the headmaster away, and I went home.

Getting home, I found my mother in tears because two men had been up to our apartment and searched it. They had torn the curtains and a few pictures off the wall. I suppose they were looking for valuables. They were looking to see if there



\* The Torah is the sacred scripture of Judaism, known to non-Jews as the first five books of the Old Testament (traditionally ascribed to Moses).

was a safe behind the picture. My mother was very upset. She said, "Let's go to Grandma's," and that's what we did. We went to the railroad station and took the train. My Grandma lived about an hour and a half away in Gondelsheim, a small village. Everything was in order there. There was a Nazi in full uniform standing in front of Grandma's house; he happened to be the next-door neighbor. This man put on his Nazi uniform and stood in front of the house so that no one would do anything to Grandma. He looked out for us. So he was a good Nazi, if there is such a thing.

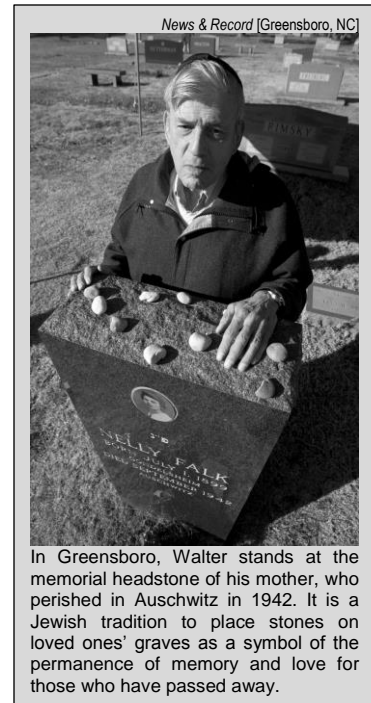
*Walter's mother searched for ways to get Walter out of Germany. Through a friend she learned of the Kindertransport program, through which 10,000 children, mostly Jewish, were allowed to emigrate out of Nazi-occupied territory to England. When Walter left in 1939, he hoped he would see his mother again.*

After I left Germany, my mother moved in with her mother in the village of Gondelsheim. On October 22, 1940, all the Jews in this part of Germany, which was the province called Baden, were deported to Vichy, France. They were not told where they were going. They were given 15 minutes—at most, two hours—to get a suitcase packed, and they were allowed to take, I think, 50 kilos [about 100 pounds]—or whatever they could carry. There were little children and there were very old people. There were sick people. There were no exceptions made. They were put into cattle cars and sent off. My mother and grandmother were sent to the Gurs internment camp in unoccupied France.

In 1942, my mother was sent to Auschwitz. [He reads from a list of Nazi deportations.] It says here, "Nelly Falk shipped on Convoy #33, September 16, 1942." The Germans were very good at keeping records, and they listed exactly the train she was on. She was identified by her birthdate. There was only one Nelly Falk listed who was born on July 1, 1899. So there is no question about this.

It's just recently that I could talk about it [1980s]. I would never have talked about the Holocaust during the 1940s and 1950s and maybe into the '60s. I wouldn't talk about it. It was too fresh. But now it needs to be told. Because there are people who say it never happened, and there are also people today, if you listen to them carefully, who are trying to justify what happened. I didn't go through what other people with numbers on their arms went through. I'm the luckiest fellow in the world. It could have me down there, too. No, I am very lucky.

*Walter came to the U.S. in 1944 to live with an aunt in New York, where he finished high school. He was drafted into the army during the Korean War (1950-1953), serving in Iceland. When he returned he married his wife Ginger, who had left Germany with her family before the war. He began a long career in sales with the Lion Ribbon Co. In 1960 Walter and Ginger moved to Greensboro, NC, when Walter assumed the sales region of North Carolina and Virginia. They have no children.*



In Greensboro, Walter stands at the memorial headstone of his mother, who perished in Auschwitz in 1942. It is a Jewish tradition to place stones on loved ones' graves as a symbol of the permanence of memory and love for those who have passed away.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

- "Pebbles from a 'Kindertransport,'" *News & Record* [Greensboro, NC], December 6, 2006  
[www.greensboro.com/news/columnists/pebbles-from-a-kindertransport/article\\_50918661-8fa5-5c72-ba17-261ea7f461dd.html](http://www.greensboro.com/news/columnists/pebbles-from-a-kindertransport/article_50918661-8fa5-5c72-ba17-261ea7f461dd.html)

Selection from Cecile Holmes White, *Witnesses to the Horror: North Carolinians Remember the Holocaust*, published in cooperation with the N.C. Council on the Holocaust, 1987, [archive.org/details/witnessestohorro00whit](http://archive.org/details/witnessestohorro00whit). Reproduced by permission of the author.

## ■ PREWAR NAZI GERMANY ■

### JACK ESCAPES AT AGE 14

*Born in 1924 in Poland, Jack Hoffmann was two when his family moved to Vienna, Austria. After Hitler took control of Austria in March 1938, the family registered to get visas to emigrate to the United States—a wait of two years or more. After the mass attacks of Kristallnacht eight months later, they decided to send young Jack to England on the Kindertransport.*

From the first moment [of the Nazi takeover], things changed radically. Unlike in Germany where it was a gradual approach, with us all the anti-Jewish legislation that had been passed in Germany went into effect almost immediately, including the Nuremberg Laws.\* The non-Jewish Viennese, of course, fell in love with this thing from the word go. We were touched by it to the extent that an Aryan could walk into your apartment, into your business, and help himself to whatever he wanted. We had no police protection. You could try and call the police department, but they wouldn't respond to it. The non-Jewish Viennese could also apply to have your apartment, and you were given about a couple of weeks to get out. This happened to us, and we had to move to a smaller apartment.



Jack at age 10 stands behind the right shoulder of his teacher in his public school graduation photograph, 1934.

There was no resistance whatsoever. Hitler was welcomed with open arms. The night before they marched into Austria, we like all others were listening to the radio and listening to the resignation speech.† And while he was making the speech, we could hear and see Nazis all over the place, on streetcars and trucks, with partial uniforms, most of them wearing armbands, but all with these swastika flags and shouting all these slogans—"One People, One Empire, One Leader"—and anti-Jewish songs. The following day, my father was locked out of his office and on his way home somebody pressed a sign in front of a Jewish store, "Don't buy from Jews," and he had to walk back and forth in front of that.

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Non-Jewish Austrians welcome German troops as they arrive in Vienna, March 14, 1938.

We went to school for a couple of days. We were told that we couldn't continue. One of the things that we noticed right off the bat was that my English professor showed up in a SS uniform. All the others wore swastikas. Two professors were pretty much on our side. One was the German professor. He was very very friendly with us and he would frequently run into my mother on the street—and she noticed almost immediately that when he saw her he would cross over to the other side of the street. He wasn't a Nazi by any stretch of the imagination, but he was scared. The music professor with whom we were also very chummy, he did show up, but he also was afraid to talk to us.

\* The Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 enforced the Nazi ideology of Aryan supremacy and severely restricted Jewish identity and rights.

† Realizing he could not prevent Hitler's takeover of Austria, Chancellor Schuschnigg announced his resignation in a radio speech on March 11, 1938.

As far as our non-Jewish friends are concerned, most of them were afraid to be seen with us. There were some exceptions. One was a young man whom my father had helped get into the business. He would come at least once a week, leave a laundry basket with all sorts of food items, newspapers, everything you can imagine, even some money, ring the bell, and take off. We never saw him, but he made this his regular stop. The other one was a retired Austrian colonel, and he wasn't afraid to be seen with us. He came to our house; he invited us to his house quite regularly. He was severely hurt in the First World War, had a very bad limp, but he really didn't care. I don't imagine that anybody would have done anything to him: he was a national hero—before Hitler came, of course.

### **KRISTALLNACHT\_\_November 9-10, 1938**

They rounded up at that time about 30,000 Jews, and they were sent to camps.\* They went into apartments, they went into stores, and did tremendous damage. They were beating up people in the street. Considering that this thing was done over a period of hours, it's unbelievable. The Austrians didn't need much of an incentive to get involved in these things. Even though this was supposed to be a spontaneous response to the killing of vom Rath in Paris<sup>†</sup>—this is malarkey. We have today proof that this was an order that came in, how this was organized and that the SS took part in it. They were instructed to be very careful to not damage any Aryan property that may be nearby, but they were told to lob grenades into the temples themselves. The fire department was supposed to stand by in case this got a little bit out of control. The only house of prayer that was allowed to keep standing was the main synagogue, and that was because it was too close to Aryan property!—but all the others were torched. The two temples that we went to, one where I was in the choir, was completely devastated, and that was only a few blocks away from us. The second temple, where we went for the Jewish student classes on Saturday: same thing. I have been in Vienna since then quite a few times, and there's nothing left, either place.

We had some friends who were arrested, and what was so typical of all these “actions”—was that when they took you, they wouldn't tell the family or anybody else where they were taking you. Of course, you then tried to find out from anybody, anywhere. The people who knew about it officially were afraid to tell you anything, even if they'd wanted to. Of those people who were arrested then and taken to the stadium, the vast majority of them, well over a thousand, ended up in concentration camps. At that time, it was still possible for some people, if they could show that they had a visa to go somewhere, to actually be able to take advantage of it. Some did, but the vast majority of them ended up in camps.



A synagogue in flames during Kristallnacht



The shattered stained glass windows of a synagogue after Kristallnacht

\* Twenty-seven Austrian Jews were murdered during Kristallnacht. About 6,000 Austrian Jews were arrested; most were sent to Dachau concentration camp, released only if they agreed to emigrate immediately. Jack's father was arrested later, in September 1939, but was released three weeks later.

<sup>†</sup> The murder of a German diplomat, Ernst Eduard vom Rath, in Paris by a Polish Jewish young man on November 9 was used as a pretext for Kristallnacht to present it as a spontaneous outburst instead of a Nazi-planned pogrom against Jews.

## KINDERTRANSPORT November 1938 – September 1, 1939

Since we couldn't go to schools, the Zionist organizations\* had various schools that were approved by the Nazi government, and I took courses that were to prepare you for Israel—what was then Palestine. I took one course in shoemaking, another in plumbing. I was told then that I

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was eligible for Kindertransport. I'd never heard about it before. Neither did my family. I was told to talk to my parents about this thing, to be ready within a week, and this is what it was. My mother thought that she wanted to keep the family together. But my father said, "Look, he'll be safer, and he'll come with us to America, ultimately." So we got instructions on what we could take along—it was rather limited—and when we would have to be at the train station. And, really, it happened awfully fast. I said my goodbyes to all the people we were still in touch with. They came to our house. Then we went to the train station, and

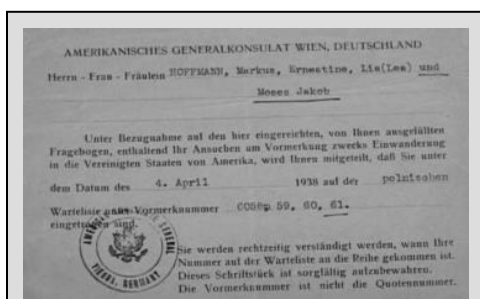
it was a rather teary scene. It was difficult for a kid my age. It was an adventure, but by the same token, it was something that overwhelmed me almost completely.

We got on the train. We went through Germany to Holland. In Holland, Jewish organizations had arranged all these things at the train station itself. They gave us juices and things to eat, but the main thing is that people smiled at us. That is something we really weren't used to.

From there we went to Holland, and we took a ferry across to Harwich, England. From there we took a train to Liverpool station. One of the things I didn't realize was that there were Jewish cab drivers in London. They passed a hat around [to collect money], got us all these chocolates, and talked to us mostly in Yiddish, which most of us kids didn't really know, but it was close enough to German that we could understand it. Since I was sponsored by a Zionist organization, I went to a camp, an agricultural camp, and some of the other kids went to private homes, some went to hostels. It all took a couple of hours, and off we went.

My experience at that point was quite different from most kids because I was shifted around from this agricultural camp, then to a nursery [a business growing trees and plants for sale], from there to a youth hostel in London, from there to a camp, and finally to Wellingborough, in Northamptonshire County. At the station I was met by the secretary of Nicholsons Sons & Daniels, who found us lodging, and we started to work at the tannery.<sup>†</sup>

We had to take a certain medicine, and at that time we were with a childless couple named Higgins. I and another fellow went there—he also came from Vienna, pretty similar background to my own. The medicine

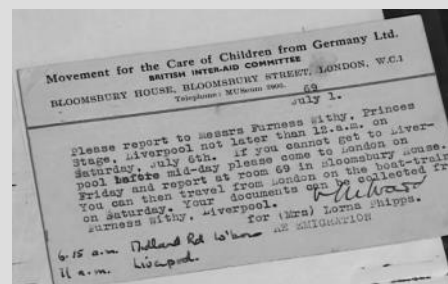


Confirmation from the U.S. embassy in Vienna that the Hoffmann family had registered for visas to emigrate to the U.S., April 1938

USHMM/Steven Pressman



Austrian Jewish children view the Statue of Liberty as they arrive in New York harbor, June 1939 (not Jack's group).



Instructions from the Kindertransport office in London for Jack's travel to Liverpool to board a ship for the United States, 1940

\* Zionist: a person or organization supporting the creation of a nation for the Jewish people. The nation of Israel was created in 1948 after the war.

<sup>†</sup> Nicholsons Sons & Daniels was a British tannery and leather importing company. A tannery treats animal hides and skins to produce leather.

tasted terrible, so we poured it into the kitchen sink. They found it and took us to the fellow who had picked us up at the station. He realized right off the bat that we didn't hit it off with this family too well, and he found us lodgings with Mrs. Dugan. And that was quite a difference. She was a retired nurse and she took real good care of us. Very very kind family. And I stayed with her until I took the boat to America.

That was a little bit of an experience. We got onto the ship in Liverpool. It was a former Polish coastal vessel, the MS *Baltrover*. It was a very small boat, less than 3000 tons dead weight, and we joined a convoy. One or two days out of Liverpool, the convoy left us because we were too slow. I don't think we were too much of a challenge for a German U-boat because of the size and lack of any superstructure; it was hardly visible. But it was a very tough voyage; it took about 15 days to Boston. After a few days, everybody got seasick, including the captain and the first mate. The ship was not really rigged for comfort. We had about 20 refugees who were going to America on that ship—the lucky ones.

*Jack left Austria for England in June 1939, and he emigrated to America in June 1940. Earlier in 1940, his parents and sister had finally received exit visas, two years after registering with the U.S. embassy after the Nazi takeover of Austria. They left Austria in February 1940, arriving in the United States five months before Jack arrived.*

They took a ship from Trieste [Italy] and didn't arrive in New York until February 1940. We had written to each other fairly regularly until the war began [Sept. 1939]. I did hear from them once or twice, but when we lost touch with them completely we really feared the worst. This was when my landlady said she was ready to adopt me.

The whole idea of being in America was something that was difficult for us to imagine. We came from a country that was at war. To be in America, to be in a country that was not threatened, as such, was just unbelievable. I met my family at the bus depot in New York. My father had aged tremendously. My mother and my sister were wearing lipstick and things like that, and it was strange because I wasn't used to it. Of course, it was a joyous event. We couldn't wait to go home and just talk about what had happened.

*Jack's favorite uncle disappeared and the family could never determine his fate. Another uncle died in Buchenwald with his family; another died in Lodz. One cousin survived about four years in concentration camps, including Auschwitz.*

*Jack graduated from high school in 1943 and was drafted into the U.S. army. Upon discharge in 1946, he went to New York University on the GI Bill of Rights, graduating in 1950. He began a long career in foreign trade, managing the U.S. subsidiaries of two European companies. In 1982 he married his wife Nancy, and in 1997 they moved to Greensboro, North Carolina. They have no children. Jack became active with the Kindertransport Association, and he contributed to Holocaust education throughout the state.*



Jack during his 2006 interview in Greensboro

## ONLINE RESOURCES

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- Oral testimony of Jack Hoffmann, 2006 (excerpted here), video: 1 hr. 50 min. (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum) [collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn126354](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn126354)

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