



Tales of Texas

NEWSLETTER



March 2024

This issue of Tales of Texas details an "Adopted Texan" who survived the Holocaust and became a successful Houston businessman.

It's the story of Walter Kase, Texas Hero.

The two photos in the masthead are the first Republic of Texas flag, by author, and the other is from the Houston Holocaust Museum's X Account. Other photos in this edition are from the Holocaust Museum website and Facebook page of Pasadena High School. Walter's photo is from: thesocialbook.com

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A Survivor Speaks

I would like to share an experience I had some years back when I was a teacher at Pasadena (TX) High School. As the story will reveal, taking life's blessings for granted is something we should never do.

PHS reps reached out to the Holocaust Museum and asked for a speaker to address the entire student body. They sent an extraordinary man.

He was an older gentleman, but certainly not frail. He looked like a movie star who could have been a leading man a couple of decades prior. He thanked me for teaching the Holocaust to his audience and then he went to work with an enthusiasm that can only be held by someone on a special mission. He was a gifted speaker. He introduced himself and told the kids that they could call him Walter. He told the kids he was going to relay to them what happened to him when he was a teenager. And then he did.

After Walter established this incredibly magnificent rapport, he said that he was from Łódź, Poland. His father owned a large commercial laundry there and was very successful. Walter lived there with his parents and sister. Then the Germans came. They took his sister and some other people and shot them down in the street in front of Walter. The long evil nightmare had begun for Walter.

His parents were separated in Łódź. Walter and his father were transported to various locations, including Oswiecim, Poland. The Germans called this place Auschwitz. Walter told us of his experiences there in his home country of Poland. One cannot imagine the horror of this place.



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*Pasadena High School
Pasadena, Texas*



Walter Kase, Texas Hero

Walter's father was assigned to a work detail outside the camp. Polish farmers in the area would hide food in the form of potato pancakes that the unfortunate Jews in the work parties would place under their clothes and smuggle back into the camp. Walter's father would feed his son this hidden food to keep him alive. The days stretched to weeks, months, and years. The horrors of Auschwitz were magnified and increased daily. Eventually, over one million people died at this location alone. That scale of death is impossible to wrap your head around.

As the war progressed and the Soviets moved through Poland, Walter and his father were transported from Poland to Austria. They went through the system of unimaginable cruelty in Mauthausen and ultimately ended up in Guns kirchen. The German Army could no longer feed their own troops properly so the thought of giving a Jew some food never entered their minds. Mass starvation could now do the work of bullets and gas.

Women teachers and girls in the auditorium went through their purses searching for tissues as Walter spoke. Men and boys sat in stunned silence. The teaching lesson of the Holocaust had literally come alive; the kids were receiving the lesson of a lifetime and they knew it.

Then, finally, one of the happiest days of Walter's life had come at long last. The 71st Infantry Division of the U.S. Army arrived and liberated the death camp. One of the soldiers gave Walter a Hershey bar, and he told the kids that it was still his favorite candy. But the Army and Walter learned a sobering lesson that day: starving people can't be fixed with a Hershey bar.

Walter's father was admitted to a U.S. Army hospital and treated for hunger for thirty days. Walter visited his father daily hoping that their lives would soon be restored, but that was not to be. Walter received the Army doctor's sad news that his father could not be saved. At age 39, Walter's father had starved to death. Walter now realized his father had sacrificed his life by giving him his food so Walter could live.



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Auschwitz

By now the school auditorium could no longer conceal the audible sobs from the audience. Walter continued his story by telling the students that hate is something to be on guard against. He said you know hate because it destroys while love builds up things and people. He told a knowing audience how *intolerance* led to the unimaginable. He reiterated that word. The kids knew that word was especially evil. They learned that word well.

He started the conclusion of his remarks by telling the kids to never take for granted the special things in their lives. Their family being the first. Walter lost seventy members of his family in the Holocaust. He told the kids that their parents were doing the best they could and to appreciate their efforts.



Holocaust Museum Houston

He told them never to take their freedom for granted and to not while away their youth in some jail cell someplace. He told them sitting in an auditorium and receiving an education from people who cared for them was another thing he was denied as a teenager. He told them shelter is something all human beings need, and it can be gone if the month's rent is not paid.

He said his wife kidded him about the pantry in his house. It was huge and contained enough food so nobody he knew would ever starve to death. He told the kids to eat properly and never waste food.

Finally, he told the kids to never take love for granted. The love from and to others is God's greatest gift. In the end, it will always overturn hate. Love from his father and to his father was what kept his faith in God alive and gave him the will to live in the saddest circumstances our history has ever produced.

Walter told the kids he loved them, and he left the stage.

Nobody who heard him was ever the same. We lost Walter Kase in 2015 to Parkinson's, but in a sense, we never lose anybody who lives on in the love of our hearts.

I have found priorities should be reevaluated from time to time. Priorities reveal the things in our lives that truly matter. Walter's list is a good one to build upon: faith, freedom, parents, education, family, shelter, food, and the greatest of these, love.