

God Spared Me Twice: Fred Wertheim's Story

When a Jew comes to believe in Jesus, it not only affects his life but the lives of those closest to him—his family. This was certainly the case when Steve Wertheim, the son of a Jewish immigrant, came to believe in Jesus.

Life in Germany

Steve's father, Fred, was born in Germany in 1925. The son of a baker, he lived in a small village of 2,000 people. The town had very few Jews, 10 families to be exact. Fred, as a young boy, had to look among the non-Jews for playmates because the only other Jewish children were his two older sisters and an older Jewish girl. It didn't bother him to have Gentile friends, but it started bothering them to have a Jewish one.

By the time Fred was 8, the Aryan philosophy of Hitler was well on its way to acceptance by most Germans. Fred's best friends did not want to play with him anymore. His parents, who were prospering in the bakery business, held to the illusion that Hitler would lose his popularity and that things would get better once again for the Jews. Instead, they got worse.

The Wertheim family finally decided to leave Germany for America. However, wanting to leave and getting out of the country were two different things. Because of immigration quotas, they needed to apply to the consulate for clearance. The family had no papers prepared by a United States citizen for them, and that made emigration difficult. They were given a number—a very high one—48,878, which represented the number of people allowed to come from Germany before them. It would be a while until they could expect to go.

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Becoming an American Soldier

Meanwhile, on July 2, 1938, Fred became bar mitzvah. He was to be the last Jewish boy to undergo the ceremony in his district. Four months later came Kristallnacht. His synagogue, along with hundreds of others, was destroyed. Six days later, it was ordered that Jewish children be expelled from the schools. At the same time, Jewish males who were 13 or older were being conscripted for labor camps.

Fred was small for his age and because of his size was overlooked. Before long, entire Jewish families were being deported to the death camps. Yet, for some mysterious reason, his family was spared. Their immigration number came up, and in May of 1941 the Wertheims left what had become Hitler's Germany. They traveled by way of France, Spain and Portugal and arrived on the shores of what they saw to be heaven on earth—America.

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