

# Holocaust speaker comes to BC

## *92-year-old shares stories from the past to avoid ‘reliving’ it*

By Mickayla Smith  
Staff Writer

On Jan. 16, Dr. Walter Ziffer came to Brevard College to talk to Brevard Middle School students, Brevard College students and community members about the Holocaust.

Dr. Ziffer is a 92-year-old from Czechoslovakia who came to the United States in 1948. He earned an engineering degree from Vanderbilt University, two master's degrees from the graduate school of Theology of Oberlin College and a doctorate in theology from the University of Strasbourg in early Christian history, Biblical Hebrew and comparative religion.

Dr. Ziffer is the author of three books including "The Birth of Christianity from the Matrix of Judaism: From Jewish Sect to World Religion," "The Teaching of Disdain: An Examination of Christology and New Testament Attitudes Toward Jews" and his personal memoirs

of "Confronting the Silence: A Holocaust Survivor's Search for God." All books are available on Amazon.com.

"I am here because I feel like I should share the story of the Holocaust," Ziffer said. "If we do not learn from the past, we are condemned to relive it." Six million Jewish people were murdered, 60-80,000 Romas (Gypsies), Jehovah's Witnesses, Christians, pastors, priests, socialists and 100,000 soldiers vanished. In Ziffer's own family, 15 were murdered in concentration camps.

Before the Czech Republic was occupied by the German army, it was a democratic country. Ziffer said his family was among the middle-class and beloved by the people in their neighborhood.

When the Czech Republic was occupied by the German army, anti-Semitism spread rapidly throughout their town. People who were considered friends of the family turned against the Ziffers. Their town synagogue was burned down by the Germans. Their whole world turned upside down and everyone seemed to hate the Jews.

Jews were forced to wear white bands around their arms with the Star of David attached to it. On June 29, 1942, the Ziffer family moved into a ghetto. However, even in the miserable state everyone was in, they still found happiness in being together.

That sadly did not last long. SS officials bombarded the ghettos and took everyone to the train station. The SS officers had whips and handguns and took all of their belongings. They separated men from women by their ages. All the families were separated and the lives that they knew were taken away from them as they all entered a new universe.

They entered a universe where their rights were stripped away from them. The Jews weren't considered people anymore. Officials would torture these people for entertainment.

It was chaotic and disgusting. Dr. Ziffer was taken in 1942 when he was 15. He moved around to seven different concentration camps for three years until they were liberated. Luckily, his story has a happy ending.

After everyone was liberated, Ziffer went on a quest to find his family. He found his mother, sister and cousin. After that, the four of them went back home to Těšín. They found one of their old maids and she told them that his father was already staying with her.

Finally, the family was reunited. Some things would never be the same, but at least they were together. It is important to remember the Holocaust. I know most of us would rather not think about something so vile but Ziffer has a point. If we don't learn from the past, "we are condemned to relive it."

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Dr. Walter Ziffer, a 92-year-old Holocaust survivor, speaks to a crowd of students about his experiences in Ingram Auditorium on Jan. 16.

Courtesy of Kevin Smith