

Diversity, Equality & Inclusion **DEI Committee Friday Thoughts**

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International Holocaust Remembrance Day
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I was asked to write a "Friday Thoughts" article about International Holocaust Remembrance Day. There is so much to say about the Holocaust that it could fill thousands of books (and it has), so I had difficulty deciding what I wanted to highlight in just a few pages.

Let's start by addressing an important question: What was the Holocaust? [According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#), it was "the systemic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its allies and collaborators." Essentially, the ultimate goal of the Holocaust was the "Final Solution" as proposed by Adolf Hitler which, according to the World Holocaust Remembrance Center, was the "[code-name for the Nazis' plan to solve the 'Jewish question'](#)" with the ultimate goal being the extermination of all of the Jewish people in Europe.

How did Europe get to this point? What actions led up to the Holocaust? My paternal grandparents were both Holocaust survivors. One of my grandfather's favorite quotes was, "The Holocaust did not start with bullets, it started with words." It started because Germany needed someone to blame after they faced defeat during World War I. [Hitler used antisemitic stereotypes and tropes](#) such as calling the Jews a "subhuman race" and "a dangerous cancer that would destroy the German people" as a justification and need for the murder of all of the European Jews. "The 'Final Solution' was the [culmination of many years of evolving Nazi policy](#)."

Of course, antisemitism is not new. It has been around for 2,000 years and often perpetuates negative stereotypes and untrue beliefs such as Jews controlling the media, Jews being money-hungry, Jews having horns and Jews seeking world domination. The list goes on and on.

There is, of course, so much more I could say, but let's move on to the next question: Why should we have a day (January 27) to remember something that happened between 1933-1945? That seems like such a long time ago!

We need to remember the Holocaust so that it may never happen again. There is an old saying that "those who forget history are condemned to repeat it," which is why we must remember.

My grandfather was born in 1922 in Berlin, Germany. He enjoyed a normal childhood and his family always considered themselves to be German citizens first – their Judaism was not their nationality. His father even served in World War I as a German soldier and was proud to do so. However, after Adolf Hitler came to power, everything changed for them.

My grandfather, who loved school and sports, was no longer able to sit with the other boys in his class (who, as members of the Hitler Youth, came to class wearing swastikas) and was no longer able to participate in soccer.

He and his family were lucky. Through a series of fortunate events, they were able to emigrate to England and then eventually to America. My grandfather was then drafted into the United States Army. He was chosen for an elite group of German-speaking Americans who were trained to return to Germany and interrogate Nazis.



Figure 1: My grandfather, posing with a dog.

My grandmother was born in 1925 in Vienna, Austria. She had an idyllic childhood. Her family's apartment was so large that she learned how to roller skate in the house. However, on [Kristallnacht—or the Night of Broken Glass](#)—which occurred on November 9, 1938, everything changed. Her father and brother were forced out of their homes and made to clean the streets with toothbrushes, while their neighbors stood around mocking them. Many Jewish people were arrested and taken away that day, never to return. She and her family were luckily able to emigrate to America via Prague.

Their stories are just two of millions of stories. We must remember what hatred towards one group of people has the potential to lead to. The State of Israel was formed in 1948 at least in part as a response to the Holocaust, recognizing that the Jewish people needed a homeland to go to. I do not want this article to become too political regarding the Hamas attacks on Israel that occurred on October 7, 2023. However, it is important to note that since that date, [there has been an over 400% increase in antisemitic incidents](#) compared to this time last year. It is important to separate the Jewish people from the State of Israel. We need to find a way to learn from this and recognize the humanity in each other. [Jewish people were not the only victims or targets during the Holocaust](#). Other groups included Jehovah's Witnesses, the Roma people, homosexuals and those with mental or physical disabilities. The Holocaust was an event that affected people all over the world and it demonstrates how something that begins with a few small acts of hate can have enormous implications and consequences.

Many cities around the world have Holocaust memorials and museums. Right here in Washington, D.C. is the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#). It is free and open all year. Pictured here is the street outside of my grandmother's apartment in Vienna. It contains symbolic keys of the Jewish people in the area who were either murdered or forced to flee during the Holocaust. It is a constant reminder to all who live and visit there about what happened. There are similar memorials all throughout Europe.



Figure 2: Outside my grandmother's apartment in Vienna, symbolic keys of Jewish people who lived in the area and were forced to flee during the Holocaust.

You can learn more about International Holocaust Remembrance Day [at this link](#). Please continue to educate yourselves and your families on this tragic event. Statistics show that

[two-thirds of Americans lack basic knowledge](#) and understanding of the Holocaust. This must continue to be taught so that it may never happen again.



Figure 3: A picture of me with my grandparents.

For more information, please visit the following links:

<https://oneclipatatime.org/paper-clips-project/>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Holocaust>

<https://www.holocaustandhumanity.org/digital-program/dr-al-miller/> (My grandfather's story)

Goodwin Living DEI Committee: Statement of Purpose: Educate, Embrace, and Empower team members, residents, members* and all served by Goodwin Living to support Diversity, Equality and Inclusion.

Goodwin Living DEI Committee Desired Outcome: The Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion Committee (DEI) will seek open and honest communication and collaboration that will inform and celebrate the age, culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation of team members, residents, members* and all served by Goodwin Living without bias. *Members include Priority Club members and Goodwin Living at Home.

Questions or comments? Please contact us DEI@GoodwinLiving.org.