

# Berlin Calling

A Documentary

## Q&A with cast member Kastle Wasserman

### **What was the original inspiration for the film?**

I had been struggling to write a book about my dad's experience in the Holocaust. I started doing some research and it was very difficult because my dad had a hard time telling me about his time in Berlin and what happened in the camp. He didn't want to upset me, and I also knew it upset him in talking about it. We had done a few interviews by telephone and I had written a few attempted chapters. Then I met Nigel and I told him what I was working on. He said, "Have you been to Berlin?" and I said, "No." And he said, "Well, then I think you need to go there." So we planned a trip. I took all the research I had and my dad's addresses where he lived and we took a video camera. We thought we'd just film a few things, mostly because I wanted to take it back to show my dad. But then the whole thing started snowballing and I started digging deeper and deeper and we kept filming and traveling to different places to do more research. At some point we realized we had a documentary on our hands.

### **What did you hope to accomplish with this film?**

I really just hope to keep my father's story alive, to keep the tragic repercussions of the Holocaust top-of-mind. I'm lucky to have my dad still with me but so many of the Holocaust survivors have passed on. I fear the facts of what happened will start to disappear, the eye-witnesses will be gone. It was so horrific and unimaginable to me that this could happen to people, to real people I knew, to MY dad, who was just this normal kid growing up in a normal household and suddenly had everything ripped away from him and then was forced to live in these inhumane conditions. I could see how younger generations would have a hard time wrapping their heads around it. So I thought it was important to tell my struggle in learning about it and understanding it while letting my dad tell his account of what happened. The Holocaust is such a big, scary, horrible part of history, I wanted to find the small story, the story of one person, my dad, and let people know what he went through and how the pain of that experience lingers to this day.

### **How long was the shoot? Where did you shoot?**

We shot off and on for about 6 years. We traveled to four cities and filmed in Los Angeles, where I live. For a while, every year, we took what we jokingly called, "A Holocaust Vacation" because I would be using my two weeks vacation time from work to go on these trips and they were to the beautiful cities in Europe – Berlin, Prague, Paris – so it wasn't all terrible. We got a little sightseeing in each time we went somewhere. But the days when I went to see where the horrible things happened to my dad were really tough, really emotional.

### **What is your favorite scene in the film?**

My favorite scene is hearing about my dad talk about when he came to America, joined the Air Force, earned all those medals in the Korean War and became a U.S. citizen. I know that was one of the happiest times in his life. He talked a lot about being in the Air Force when I was a kid. He was so proud and he felt respected for the first time since being in Berlin.

**What was the most difficult scene to shoot?**

There were so many difficult scenes. I think the hardest was taking my dad and uncle to the gravesite of their father. I honestly didn't think we'd make it through, we were all crying so hard, and it was really difficult having a camera on us. But I knew it was important for the film and I wanted to honor my grandfather in showing that his sons still love him and missed him so much.

**How did you approach your dad about making this film? Was he comfortable with telling his story?**

My dad was apprehensive about telling his story in a film that will be seen by a big audience. He's been giving lectures about his experience to small gatherings in museums and schools since the 1990s and every time he has told me that it makes him so nervous. So then I wanted to put a camera in his face and ask the hard questions. It was tough on him but he was really professional about it, he was very strong. But we had to give him some moments to collect himself. It really put him through a lot, but in the end I think he got some closure on some of the emotions he had carried for over 60 years and that was a really good thing that came out of it.

**How was it like working with director Nigel Dick?**

Nigel had a very interesting perspective that he brought to the film, being a Brit whose parents had been bombed in the Blitz. He identified with the trauma but also had an outsider's take. Plus, he's a complete history buff. He knew more about the facts of WWII than I did, which really helped put our family story in context. He was so compassionate and supportive throughout the filming. I couldn't have done this without him.

**The film is a very personal journey, did you have any reservations about filming your story?**

I was very hesitant about putting myself out there in such a personal way. I never talk to my friends about my association with the Holocaust - it's such a heavy topic, it looms so large and tends to take the air out of the room. But I felt it was so important to tell my dad's story and to preserve it. There are some moments in the film where I put on my reporter's hat and I'm able to step out of myself a bit and that made it a little easier, I felt like I had a job to do.