

## Walter Kehr

Walter Kehr, a man of quiet courage, sharp intellect, gentle humor, and enduring dignity, passed away on December 28, 2025, at the age of 100.

Walter lived most of his life in Washington Heights, the neighborhood that became his refuge and his home after he emigrated from Germany in 1937 as a young Jewish boy fleeing Nazi persecution in Worms. He arrived in America at the age of twelve, carrying with him not only the trauma of displacement, but also an unshakable belief in the promise of his adopted homeland.

During World War II, W enlisted in the United States Army. Fluent in German, he was stationed in Europe, where he served in combat, including the Battle of the Bulge, and later played a crucial role interrogating prisoners of war. On May 8, 1945—Victory in Europe Day, Walter found himself back in Germany, witnessing the surrender of the regime that had forced his family to flee.

Walter never considered himself, in his words, “a glory boy.” Instead, he spoke with humility about relying on his fellow soldiers and about the profound shift that came when the war ended—when shoulders were clapped, tensions eased, and humanity cautiously resurfaced. As the only soldier in his company who could read, write, and speak German, W was promoted to sergeant and tasked with overseeing civilian affairs in the town of Bad Lauterberg. Working alongside the local mayor, he helped identify Nazis and support denazification efforts—work he later described as his most meaningful contribution to America.

Four months later, Walter was transferred to Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, where he worked to separate prisoners of war based on their involvement with the Nazi Party.

After the war, Walter returned to New York determined never to wear a uniform again. He married, raised his children, and remained rooted in Washington Heights, a community of landsmen, shared language, and shared memory. He never returned to Germany, a decision he and his wife made together.

Walter’s connection to the Y began long time ago and deepened profoundly in later life. After the passing of his wife, Walter rejoined the Y as a volunteer in April 2002. It became, as he said, “my home away from home.” “I am eternally grateful to the Y,” Walter shared. “When my wife passed away, the Y kept me sane and active. Little by little, I was myself again because there was always something to do.”

At the Center for Adults Living Well, Walter was not just a participant, he was a presence. His history was honored, his voice respected, and his life preserved as part of our collective memory. He volunteered, reflected, debated, laughed, sang, and formed friendships that sustained him through the later chapters of his life.

As Walter aged, the Y's role evolved, as it always does for our survivors and veterans. The same community that once offered engagement and purpose later provided care: home-delivered meals, wellness calls, transportation, advocacy, celebrations, and steadfast companionship. During the pandemic, Walter stood with fellow older adults to advocate for the reopening of CALW, knowing how vital meals and camaraderie were to dignity and well-being.

Fridays at the Y held special meaning for Walter- Oneg Shabbat lunches filled with songs, reflection, and lively conversation. Even with the pandemic, those gatherings continued by phone, sustaining connection and joy.

Just this summer, on August 24, Y staff visited W to celebrate his 100th birthday, bringing flowers, cake, candles, and a card signed by the many members and staff who loved him. It was a moment that captured what the Y does best: honoring life, memory, and belonging, all the way to the end.

We are profoundly grateful to have walked alongside Walter in his final decades. He lived through history, helped shape it, and entrusted us with his care. May his memory be a blessing, and may we continue to honor him by caring for others with the same dignity, compassion, and devotion that he so deeply deserved.

