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Never Forget

“Never forget” is one of the most renowned slogans when it comes to remembering the Holocaust, but I believe that the world has already begun the progression of forgetting. The last of the Holocaust survivors are beginning to die out and the Holocaust deniers are gaining in strength and so is their message: The Holocaust never happened. The trains, ghettos, concentration camps and the six million are fading from the world’s memory and all that remains are the stories of the survivors. This is the incentive for why it is so imperative that we, the students of Goucher College, have the opportunity to interview, document, and tell the story of a Holocaust survivor. In this process, we are able to pay tribute to the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust and honor those who continue their memory. It is critical that we remind our friends, family, community, and the world so that we never forget and never allow it to happen again.

As the granddaughter of four Holocaust survivors, I have never been able to escape the Holocaust; I have never been able to forget. The Holocaust was the massive event that seemed to always be the answers to my questions and the event that forever defined my family lineage. On every single occasion when I complained about my grandparents, or any other family members, I was swiftly reminded that it was a true privilege to even have grandparents and aunts and uncles. The justification was that “all your grandparents’ family died in the Holocaust so your father never had the opportunity to have any type of family.” When I asked about my family tree, for a long time it stopped right after my great grandparents, because everyone

beyond them had died during the Holocaust. I asked my mom why my *Savta* (grandmother) and *Saba* (grandfather) moved to Israel. The answer was always the same: the Holocaust.

I never understood that my family was different from any other Jewish family. I always presumed growing up that all the other Jewish kids' grandparents were also Holocaust survivors. When I began to study American history, it was a big shock to learn about the large waves of Jewish immigrants who came to the United States before the war. Even today, the professors in many of my Jewish study classes automatically believe that most Jewish families in America, including my own, came to America before the Holocaust. On one side of my family, I am a second generation Jewish American and on the other side, I am a first generation Jewish American, who still defines herself as the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors.

In the book *I Was A Child of A Holocaust Survivor*, by Bernice Eisenstein, I find that I share many of the same feelings that Eisenstein feels about being the descendent of Holocaust survivors. In the first chapter of the book, Eisenstein speaks about searching for her father in Holocaust pictures: "While my father was alive, I searched to find his face among those documented photographs of survivors of Auschwitz...All my life, I have looked for more in order to fill in the parts of my farther that had gone missing" (Eisenstein 16). Similarly, I have often looked at the photographs that were taken during the Holocaust and have stared at them endlessly. I would search for a family member, and often wonder if one of the people in the photographs was a relative I never got to meet or my grandmother or grandfather staring back at me. There are so many things that I don't understand about my grandparents and I have always gone searching for the answers.

Guilt was inherited with the position of being the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors. The Holocaust has become a passion, or as Eisenstein said beautifully in her book:

The Holocaust is a drug and I have entered an opium den...I have only just glimpsed its power, scanning the trail of needle marks on the left forearms of each person in the room...I will discover there is no end to the dealers I can find for just one more hit, one more entry into a hallucinatory world of ghosts (Eisenstein 20).

The Holocaust is a drug. It is a hard type of addiction that you just need to keep feeding and feeding. There is no real end to the addiction, just fewer answers and more questions. Like Eisenstein, I read countless books and viewed large sums of movies that made me cry until tears could no longer fall. I traveled to Poland and saw the remnants of Jewish towns, ghettos, cemeteries and concentration camps. I stood on the very grounds of the Plaszow concentration camp, where my *Saba* was forced to work until he was barely alive. There is no true answer to my questions, and the “if” questions are endless. Nothing seems to sooth my family’s pain, my pain, which I have inherited from the Holocaust. This class was incredible for feeding my Holocaust addiction.

When feeding the addiction of “drug H” it’s important to remember: “my life is not cursed, theirs was” (Eisenstein 53). However, it cannot be this simple. The phrase: “an apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” is quite accurate. One cannot begin to understand who he or she is until one knows where he or she comes from. When I visit my *Savta* I am often reminded that I do not really know where my family has come from. There are only endless pieces to a puzzle I’ll never be able to finish. This is a challenge for the children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. Mrs. Raden gave me another place to find understanding.

There is an endless sea of testimonies from Holocaust survivors. They are kept at several museums and online at various different websites. I have interviewed my grandmother and other Holocaust survivors before, and I felt confident that I knew what to expect when I first picked up the phone and dialed Mrs. Raden’s phone number, yet I was still a bit nervous. To my surprise, a

very friendly, sweet voice answered the phone and we began to set up a time to meet for an interview.

Working with Kamaria and Lindsay was a great experience. We all took turns with the interviewing, taping, and documentation processes. I want to emphasize that I enjoyed every role. I found that when I was interviewing, I liked the control that I held over the conversation. I enjoyed listening and relaxing while I taped. I also picked up a lot of detail while I recorded the important facts.

I was the first interviewer to speak with Mrs. Raden. As soon as Lindsey (Lindsey or Lindsay?), Kamaria and I had entered her apartment, she was happy to show us the DVD, which was made for her when she had retired from teaching at a Jewish day school in Pikesville, MD. It was immediately obvious to us that we were dealing with a very special woman who had already impacted countless lives. I felt honored and privileged to speak with her about her former life before the Holocaust. I believe that she was a bit surprised that I was so interested in what her previous life was like. Like in the book, Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide, by Donald A. Richie, I made sure that my questions were prepared and thoughtful. The information that I got out of the first Interview was tremendous and overwhelming. In two hours, we were only able to cover up to right before the start of the war. I learned a lot about what life was like for a more religious family in the small town of Kaba, Hungary. I learned about the language and traditions and how important Judaism was to Mrs. Raden and her family. I had so many more questions and so much more to learn about Mrs. Raden and her story.

Mrs. Raden's comfort was my biggest concern throughout the interviewing process. I took the advice of Richie, who argues that it is very important "to put their interviewees at ease, to listen carefully to what they have to say, to respect their opinions, and to encourage candid

responses” (Richie 84). I made sure that Mrs. Raden felt comfortable. I made sure that I did not miss a single word of what she said and often asked for her to extend on the ideas that she had previously stated. Furthermore, Richie noted the importance of open-ended questions: “Use open-ended questions to allow interviewees to volunteer their own accounts, to speculate on matters, and to have enough time to include all of the material they think relevant to the subject” (Richie 92). I was not afraid to ask questions and ask for more detailed information on certain events, but phrased them in a way that she could take the question in the direction where she wanted to take it. I believe by behaving in this manner, I showed Mrs. Raden the attention she deserved and that I really did want to learn and listen to her story.

Mrs. Raden spoke mostly in common memory; her interview did not jump around and was told to us on a basic level, with very little emotion involved. However, through the common memory there was an added level of deep memory. Similarly to the case study in Lawrence L. Langer’s book, Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory, Sydney L.’s “testimony is virtually uninterrupted by questions; it appears as a modest story of how Sidney L. survived. And on the most obvious level, the one mirrored by common memory, this is exactly what it is. But its counter flow...is the rehabilitation through deep memory of the family that has vanished” (Langer 12). Mrs. Raden’s counter flow and deep memory are the memories of her father and how he almost survived the war. In Langer’s terms, I believe that he would classify Mrs. Raden, not as a former victim, but as a survivor of the war. She has moved on with her life and has made something of herself.

Each interview seemed to be marked with some happiness and an underlying tone of sadness. In the second interview we learned of her frightening tales of bombs, trains, ghettos, and concentration camps. We were left hanging until the third interview, when she continued her

story that ended in almost complete happiness. All of her family survived, with the exception of her father, her hero. However, through her years of devoting her time to Jewish education, she has passed on her father's legacy.

Mrs. Raden's story had a large impact on me. Through her story I was able to understand my own grandparents just a little bit better. My *Saba* passed away before I was born and all that I know of him are the small stories that I have heard from other people. I know bits and pieces about his time in the concentration camps and liberation. There is a small but drastic language barrier that separates my *Savta's* story from me. Once again all I know are bits and pieces and the small things she has told me. Despite the fact that Mrs. Raden does have a very different story, I am able to understand my *Saba* and *Savta* better. Her story enabled me to reach down inside myself and learn more about them and myself. In addition, I was able to find connections with other people through Mrs. Raden's story. Her life role as a teacher fits her well, because I learned so much about Judaism and the importance of family with the time I spent with her.

The process of formatting my own story from the hours of recorded testimony by Mrs. Raden was a tough process. It was difficult to choose only a few parts of her story to tell other people. The different exercises we did with Jennifer helped me narrow my story down to the parts I really connected with the most. The parts I chose to tell were all ones that I could relate to. When I tell about Mrs. Raden's experience in the concentration camp, I see a camp I saw on my journey to Poland. I visualize the town's people watching the camp. When I tell the story of the bombs falling I hear them echoing in the back of my head. I listen to them coming closer and closer and I can feel the same feeling of helplessness and fear that Mrs. Raden must have felt when she was experiencing it during the war.

I am so happy with the story I am left with today. I feel confident that I will be able to share my story with several others. I'm not even too concerned about my slight case of stage fright. I know, no matter how well or poorly I tell my story, it does not matter in the long run; it's the fact that I am telling her story and that her story is passed on to other people that counts.

The first time I had to perform my story in front of other people, besides our class, was when we went to Perry Hill High School. I was petrified of performing Mrs. Raden's story in front of the high school students. I was scared that the students were going to make fun of us. The kids at my high school were never respectful when guests came. It ended up ok. Despite being really sick, I felt like I did my job and did it well. I need to put more faith in my audience. I should not presume that an audience will not be respectful while I tell Mrs. Raden's story. Everyone needs to tell the stories of the Holocaust survivors, even if no one wants to listen.

In the past few years, echoing similarities from the Holocaust have arisen and have gone almost unnoticed. Anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment in Europe, the Former Soviet Union and in much of the world is once again climbing. Iran's president has made statements about the Jews that have a striking similarity to the very words that Adolph Hitler spoke. In 1936, in Adolph Hitler's Reichstag speech he stated: "I believe today that I am acting in the sense of the Almighty Creator. By warding off the Jews I am fighting for the Lord's work." Just as the world sat and watched the Holocaust unfold and did nothing, the same thing is happening once again. The President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, said: "As the Imam said, Israel must be wiped off the map" and "The Zionist regime is a dried up and rotten tree which will be annihilated with one storm." When he speaks about Israel being "wiped of the map" he does not only mean the state of Israel, he means the nation of Israel, the Jews. When a holocaust survivor was asked about what his thoughts were on the situation in Iran and the world today, he stated that when someone

tells a person that he wants to kill you, you take him seriously and believe him. History has shown us, time and time again, that it tends to repeat itself. Hopefully, by learning and telling Eva Raden's story, I will have reminded someone that they cannot escape the past and forget, or it will come back to haunt all of mankind.