



HISTORY LESSONS

BY RICHARD ACRITELLI

The Recollections of the Holocaust as Seen Through the Eyes of a Second-Generation Son



Bernie Furshpan

"The Weight of Memory: I Am Bernie Furshpan," is a documentary that was recently made on the struggles of Furshpan's parents to survive the Holocaust. Furshpan, a resident of Bohemia, is a retired chiropractor who had a thriving practice for thirty years to care for his patients in Bayshore. A jack-of-all-trades, he owned a comedy club in Manhattan, a marketing agency, and is currently the vice president of the Nassau County Holocaust and Tolerance Center in Glen Cove.

On May 4th at the Manhasset Cinemas, Furshpan with his family, friends, and Holocaust survivors watched this riveting documentary. The film follows the daily life of Furshpan speaking to students across Long Island about the history of the Holocaust and the need to combat local, national, and global discrimination. The director Christiane Arbesu did a masterful job in explaining Furshpan's interaction with students and the World War II story of his parents. Arbesu showed the home life and the teamwork that is presented between Furshpan and his wife Joanne to carry out a busy daily schedule.

On September 1st, 1939, Furshpan's mother Zahava Rosenblum was two years old and with her three brothers and sisters were on a train with their mother to escape the German occupation of Poland. At a stop, as they were traveling to the Soviet Union, Zahava's mother left the train with her older son to find food, and when she returned, it had already departed. Alone, these children



Bernie's Mom

moved eastward some 1,400 miles into the Soviet Union, where Zahava was cared for in a Christian orphanage. Almost two years later, Hitler ordered the massive German attack of "Operation Barbarossa" against the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Zahava and her brothers and sisters traveled deep into the Soviet Union, and they were safe from the

of Polish territory that was briefly divided between these two military powers. The Furshpan family lived in the eastern area of Poland, which is now within Ukraine. Before the Germans arrived, Moshe had a happy childhood, where he lived in the tiny village of Ludwików. Unlike Zahava's family who fully understood the atrocities that the Germans were waging against the Jews, this community of 1,500 people were isolated, where they knew little of the atrocities that were carried out by the Nazis. They received some warning from the Soviet troops who told the Jewish residents that the Germans were not to be trusted. When the Nazi authorities entered this town, there was a welcoming committee that gave them wine, gold, and food, to help establish better relations with the Germans. Quickly, the gestapo executed the welcoming committee, and a collaborator gave lists of the Jews from this community to the German secret police. By the end of the war, only thirty Jews from



Bernie, Jonathan and Tamara

in this area of Poland and Ukraine. Operating behind the fighting lines and under the cover of the war, "Einsatzgruppen" or mobile SS death squads sought Jews in hiding. In the rear, they found Jews and either killed them on the spot or brought them to locations like Babi Yar in the Ukraine, where over the span of a couple of days 33,000 people were killed. Moshe was in constant fear of being detected by the Germans who hunted Jews at

to retain Jewish independence. In the infantry, he shared one rifle with three other soldiers. Later, he worked on aircraft for the Israeli military as a mechanic. In 1953 and at twenty-two years old, Moshe met Zahava who was sixteen years old, and they were shortly married. In 1957, Furshpan and his twin brother Mark were born and they later traveled to live in Brooklyn in 1963. Furshpan recalls the creativity of his father who was a talented contractor to support his family, where he worked for John Lennon from The Beatles.

Growing up, Furshpan saw the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that plagued his parents, especially when they watched documentaries on the Holocaust. Always wanting to protect the security of his family, Moshe constantly locked his home and wanted their children to gain an education. One day, as he worked with his father, Furshpan observed the PTSD that his father regularly carried with him. Eating his meal at a local diner, a stranger innocently looked at his plate, and his father screamed at this man to stay away from his son's food. This was perhaps a reminder of not having enough food to survive when he was hiding in the woods as a child, and he never wanted his own kids to face this type of threat.

Furshpan shared an interesting assimilation story about how he grew up in a large Italian area of Marine Park, Brooklyn. He had the opportunity to eat meals that were cooked by his Italian neighbors and presented the story of "Mrs. Russo" and her "meatballs." With a big smile, he spoke about his early love for Italian meals that were certainly different from the Polish and Jewish cuisine that was regularly served in his home. Today, the Furshpan's still learn about the horrors of the Holocaust that impacted their parents, but since they came to this nation, they have a sprawling family of fourteen members. The happiness and success of their loved ones was their answer to the destruction of Hitler's regime. From start to finish, "The Weight of Memory: I Am Bernie Furshpan," is a vital recollection of the Holocaust through the eyes of this local resident who is still learning about the story of his family during this tragic event.



Moshe and the Family

advance of the German Wehrmacht that extended toward the outskirts of Moscow and within the city of Stalingrad. Later, it took Zahava's mother five years to reunite with her children, and they eventually made it to Israel in 1947.

Moshe Furshpan was eight years old when World War II began and he lived within the Soviet sphere

Ludwików survived the Germans attempts to shoot them in the woods or to deport them to an extermination camp.

Once Moshe escaped the town, the gestapo immediately issued an arrest warrant against this 10-year-old boy. First, he went to a Protestant dairy farmer, but he was quickly told to run into the woods to evade being captured and shot by the Germans. On his own for the next three years, Moshe lived in underground bunkers, ate bark, berries, and dead rabbit carcasses. Hiding in the woods, this young boy was not only hunted by the Germans and their dogs, but he had to endure the wolves and coyotes that lurked in this forest. Outside of these dangers, Moshe was forced to live in the winter snow and low temperatures of the woods.

For two-and-a-half years, Moshe survived the height of the Holocaust that claimed seven members of his immediate family. The Germans were determined to kill every Jew

night, where their dogs could smell them in their hiding spots or by collaborators who informed the SS of their presence.

Before the German invasion of Ukraine, there were 2.7 million Jews, where only 1.1 million were estimated to have survived the war. There were 3.3 million Jews in Poland, where most of them were sent to extermination camps that killed an estimated 2.7 million of this large population. For Moshe, he had to wait until the slow military advance of the Soviet Union that finally reached this part of Eastern Poland. For several months, Jews did not trust the Soviets, before they emerged in the open. After the war ended, Moshe traveled to a displaced person camp in Munich, West Germany. At fifteen years old, Moshe headed by ship to Haifa, Israel, before President Harry S. Truman recognized the State of Israel in 1948.

Now a young man, Moshe fought in the earliest wars against the Arabs



Moshe and Zahava