

Dr. Bernie Furshpan: Sharing a Legacy of Holocaust Survival and Education

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Dr. Bernie Furshpan | lamBernie.com

Dr. Bernie Furshpan has spent much of his life sharing a story that is both deeply personal and profoundly universal.

“Both my parents were Holocaust survivors,” said the vice chairman of the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County. “They didn’t talk much about it when I was a young kid. As we became teenagers, my mother started telling me stories about what my father went through. He’s the only survivor in a family of eight. They killed his mother, his father, his 4-year-old brother, his sister, his brothers... all gone.”

During World War II, his father, only 10 years old at the time, survived by hiding from the Nazis in a forest for three years under brutal conditions, living “like an animal” in freezing Polish winters. He later made it to a displaced persons camp, then to Israel, where he met Furshpan’s mother. At age six, Bernie and his twin brother joined their parents in Brooklyn, where he eventually attended Stony Brook University.

Before immersing himself in Holocaust education, Furshpan led a multifaceted life. “I had a chiropractic practice in Bay Shore, worked in media, had a marketing agency, was a TV personality. I even became a stand-up comic, and my wife and I ran the original Gotham Comedy Club in Manhattan for eight years,” he said.

It wasn’t until later in life that Furshpan began focusing on his father’s story and the work of the Tolerance Center in Glen Cove. He now educates young people, leads tours, and shares the lessons of history through storytelling. “Mine is a little different because I do it from a different angle, a different perspective,” he said. “I try to have the kids see humanity differently—not just from the victimhood or perpetrator point of view. We are all relatives. There’s only one race: the human race.”

Furshpan also helped build the center’s podcast studio, where 25 podcasters, including historians, educators, and survivors, share stories of heroism and resilience. “We’ve done 250 podcasts already,” he said. “It’s a beautiful, legitimate studio. We continue to give a platform for stories that matter.”

A top podcaster who has produced dozens of engaging programs at the studio is the South Shore Press’ own Rich Acritelli, who writes a weekly “History Lessons” column.

A filmmaker was inspired by Furshpan’s efforts to create a film not only about his father but also about his mission to educate new generations. “It’s won seven awards at film festivals worldwide,” he said. “It’s about coexistence, learning from the Holocaust, and understanding that words of hate can lead to violence—and ultimately, genocide—if society doesn’t learn from history.” For more information on the movie, visit www.IamBernie.com.

Beyond the museum and the podcast studio, Furshpan emphasizes a universal message. “I tell kids: look around the room. You’re looking at your 15th to 50th cousins. This is a family reunion. We’re all connected. It’s science, it’s humanity, it’s one race, one species,” he said.

Through the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center, Bernie Furshpan has turned the pain of his family’s history into a mission of education, tolerance, and hope. He lives in Bohemia with his wife, Joanne, and continues to inspire others with the stories of courage that shaped his life.