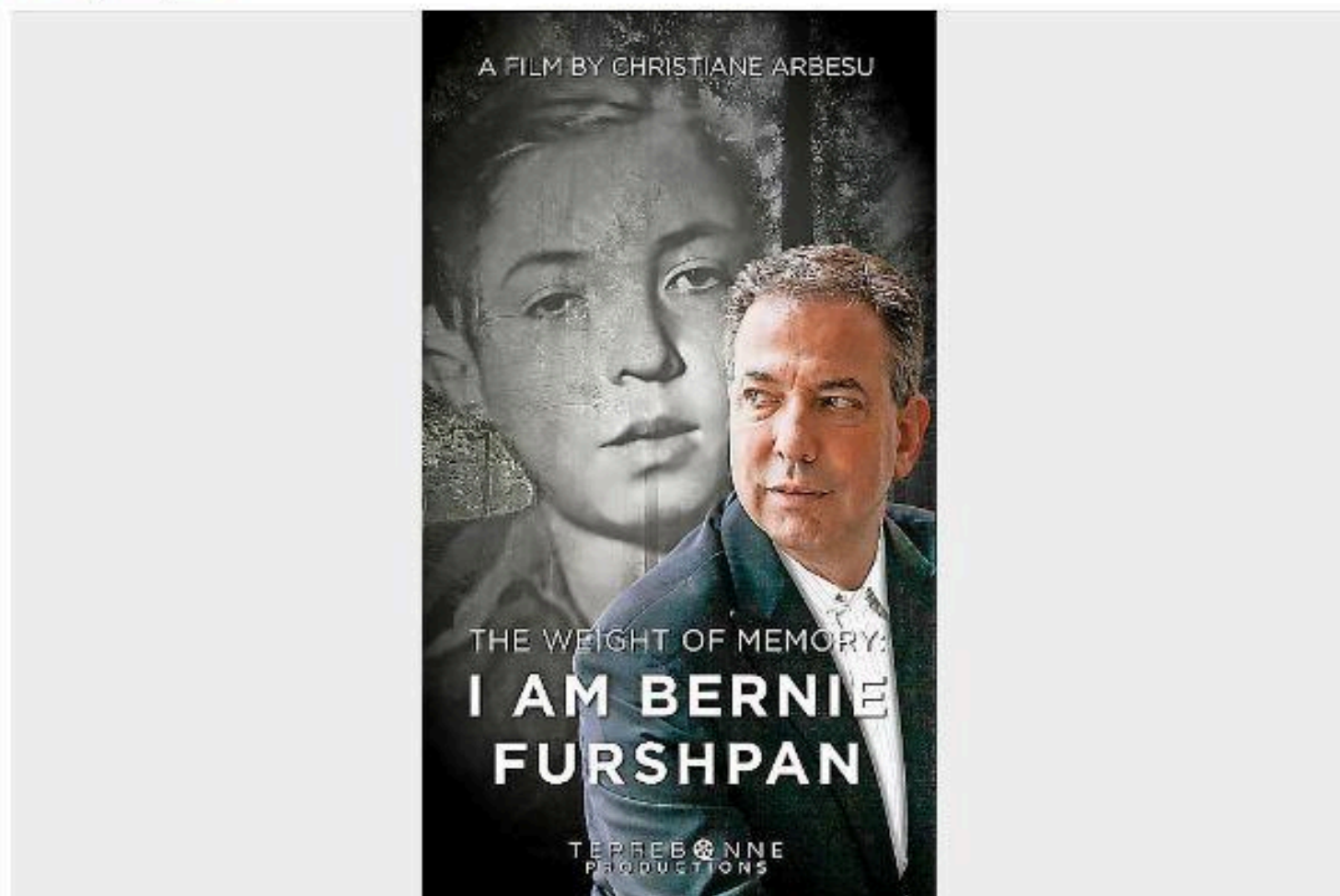


The Weight of Memory: I Am Bernie Furshpan' – a gripping documentary on Holocaust survival and confronting antisemitism

Posted April 11, 2025



At a time of rising antisemitism and fading firsthand Holocaust testimony, a new documentary seeks to bridge generations and confront intolerance with truth.

COURTESY CHRISTIANE ARBESU

“ *It was too painful to discuss.* ”

BERNIE FURSHPAN VICE CHAIR,
HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL AND
TOLERANCE CENTER

By **Roksana Amid**

At a time of rising antisemitism and fading firsthand Holocaust testimony, a new documentary seeks to bridge generations and confront intolerance with truth. “The Weight of Memory: I Am Bernie Furshpan,” directed by Christiane Arbesu, is an intimate and urgent film that follows Bernie Furshpan as he shares his father’s harrowing

Holocaust story with students and community groups.

The documentary, set to premiere May 4, at Manhasset Cinemas, and again on June 22, at the Triad Theater in Manhattan — weaves together memory, trauma and hope in a powerful call to action. Furshpan, 67, the vice chair of the Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center, was initially reluctant to be the focus of the film. “She asked me,” he said of Arbesu, “and I said, that sounds great. Then the next day, I was mulling it over in my head. I said, oh my God, I don’t know if I want this kind of publicity. (But) if it’s going to help, if it’s going to get my message out there and get me more opportunities to speak to more schools and get television appearances to talk about our mission, then I think it’s a good idea.”

The story Furshpan tells is that of his father, Moshe Furshpan, who was just 10 when he was forced to flee alone into the forests of Nazi-occupied Poland, now Ukraine. There were 1,500 inhabitants of Ludwików, 1,500 of whom were Jews, and only 30 survived. Moshe Furshpan was one of them.

“What’s incredible is that Bernie has dedicated the last couple of years to tell his father’s story,” Arbesu, who produced the film as well, said. “People can, A, know about the Holocaust, and B, know that it existed.”

Furshpan recalled that his parents did not willingly share the details of their past when he was a child, telling him only that they had survived the Holocaust.

“But they didn’t really talk much about their experience per se,” he said. “What they would do is watch movies or documentaries about the Holocaust in black and white, and they would just sit there and sob. I knew who was killed, but he didn’t really talk much about that. It was too painful to discuss.”

The full picture emerged only later. Furshpan simply couldn’t believe people had actually experienced the atrocities of the Holocaust.

“Even when I talk to young kids, I see their reactions,” he said. “It’s almost like a script of a movie. These things actually happened to people.”

For Arbesu, the decision to tell Furshpan's story grew out of a deep sense of responsibility. Before she heard that story in January at HMTTC, when he spoke at a ceremony recognizing the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, she remembers reading statistics from 2022 about the highest incidences of violence against Jews since World War II. Her approach is narrative-driven, weaving interviews with Furshpan into footage of him giving tours and speaking at the center.

"It's Bernie's story," Arbesu said. "We cut between Bernie and I having a conversation in the car, to Bernie at a middle school, and then Bernie at the museum, and then a sit-down interview. They can hear a really powerful story of resilience."

One unexpected moment in the film came when Arbesu asked Furshpan if he had ever seen his father cry.

"She asked me questions that just blew me away," he said. "I did see him cry. The first time I saw him cry was when we graduated high school. It was all worth surviving the forest for three years as a little kid, because look at the outcome."

Furshpan also reflected on the lasting emotional weight carried by his mother, who died in 2010.

"My father died of a broken heart four years later," he said. "He cried every single day. She actually took on a maternal role. She raised my dad."

Furshpan said he often reflects on the work of his twin brother, Mark, a psychologist whose doctoral thesis introduced the now widely used term "intergenerational trauma."

"My dad passed on this (post-traumatic stress disorder) in a way, because I grew up with it," Furshpan explained. "And then my kids got a certain portion of it. It takes about seven generations to kind of, like, go away."

Despite the pain, Furshpan sees hope in telling stories like his. He sometimes becomes emotional when retelling his father's story, but he realizes the social and historic significance of doing so.

"I'm just trying to make a little impact," he said. "Because a butterfly flapping its wings can eventually lead to a thunderstorm. So everybody contributes in a certain way."

To Furshpan, the documentary is more than a personal story — it's a reminder of what's at stake in today's world. He feels there's a sense of urgency, because hate "is alive and well and spreading like wildfire," he said. He added that antisemitism is the longest existing form of hate in the history of humankind. Still, his message ends with resilience.

"The Jews that are still around and contributing to society are really part of a lineage of survivors," he said. "It says a lot about the resilience of the Jewish people, that they have hope. The national anthem for Israel is called Hatikvah. The word is hope."

"The Weight of Memory: I Am Bernie Furshpan" will screen on May 4, at 5 p.m., at Manhasset Cinemas, and on June 22, at 5 p.m., at the Triad Theater in Manhattan.