

'You don't have to inherit hate': A Holocaust story echoes in Gozo

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20 Jul 2025 MATTHEW BONANNO

At first glance, the Don Bosco Oratory in Victoria, Gozo, seems like an odd place for a New Yorker to premier a documentary about educating young people on the Holocaust.

But for Bernie Furshpan, the protagonist of *The Weight of Memory*, Gozo has a special place in his heart.

"My wife Joanne and her family emigrated from Xewkija to New York when she was a child. I met her at the Manhattan nightclub I used to run. She's the greatest thing that ever happened to me," Furshpan says.

Nightclub owner is just one of several

jobs the 68-year-old has had throughout his life. Furshpan also had a 30-year career as a chiropractor, which led to a 12-year stint as a TV show host, with some stand-up comedy thrown in for good measure.

"I learned the value of being flexible from my father. For him, it was a survival instinct."

His late father, Moshe, is the main reason why he eventually ended up becoming a Holocaust educator and vice chairperson of the Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center in Nassau County on Long Island.

He lived in eastern Poland, on the

border of the Soviet Union near what is now Ukraine. When the Nazis occupied his village in 1941, at first the inhabitants didn't realise what their plans were. The Jewish community ended up

subjected to forced labour for a year before being shot en masse.

Despite losing his entire family, Furshpan's father, then aged 10, managed to escape into the forest, where he evaded capture for three years.

His mother's story is similarly harrowing. Hailing from western Poland, on the border with Germany, her family fled towards Russia when the



Bernie Furshpan in a production still from *The Weight of Memory*. Inset: Furshpan and his wife.

war started. She was separated from her mother on a train journey and ended up in a Christian orphanage. It took five years for her mother to find her again.

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His father's experience in particular is central to the presentations he gives at the centre, in which he teaches younger generations about

the dangers of hatred and intolerance.

"I tell them that you don't have to inherit hate – you can push it back. I also encourage kids to be true leaders

— to sit with people who are alone, to listen to their grandparents, to appreciate everything they have. My father appreciated even a square of toilet paper. That kind of gratitude is powerful.”

The idea for the documentary came during the COVID-19

Pandemic, when Furshpan's entertainment ventures were forced to close.

“I had time to reflect and began diving deeper into my father’s story. As I learned more, I became angry about how his neighbours – people who lived alongside them – turned on them. My sister told me about the Holocaust Museum. I visited, shared my father’s story and quickly became very involved.”

The documentary itself weaves together his father's story, how it shaped his life, and how he tries to inspire young people to be better.

"I use the Holocaust as a vehicle to teach people about the dangers of propaganda, manipulation and dehumanisation."

One of the phrases that emerged after the horrors of the Holocaust was “never again”. Asked how the world is doing in that regard, Furshpan replies “not good”.

"We've seen many genocides since then. 'Never again' should mean we never allow propaganda to drive violence and dehumanisation again. But we're failing. Even today, children and communities around the world are at risk. We have to act, not just speak."

The situation in the US is also alarming, he says.

“There’s too much disinformation and polarisation. People feel like they have to pick sides, but the only side we should be on is humanity.”

At its premiere in Victoria in May, the documentary received positive reviews from the group of youths who watched it, further endearing Gozo to Furshpan.

"Gozo has a quaintness and simplicity I adore. Everyone seems to be related, and the community is incredibly warm. I also love the nat-

ural beauty, the churches and the festas. The spirit of friendly competition – what you call pika in Maltese – during the festas is amazing.”

The Weight of Memory will soon be on networks like Amazon Prime, Apple TV and Hulu.

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