

The
DEFIANT REQUIEM
Foundation

Survivor Quotes from 'Defiant Requiem' Film

Felix Kolmer:

"It was something which made us strong. That's the reason we call it cultural resistance. It has given us resistance against our fate."

"We went to Auschwitz with a transport of 1, 500 men. On the ramp of Auschwitz to Birkenau, which was the extermination camp, I had seen Raphael Schächter the last time."

"Remembered at the time that somebody wished to help us, and that was Rafael Schächter and all the singers."

Zdenka:

"Being on stage doing a performance for people who were sitting in the audience was an uplift, it was not entertainment. It was a fight for life."

"It started, filtering news that they were making lists of Jewish families and they would be sent somewhere."

"We came to the station and there were already a lot of people, and old ones and children crying and so on all pushed into a train. And off we went. Had no idea where we were going."

"Who of us worked in the kitchen we could have a little bit more food than just one potato and one ladle of soup but I remember when we were giving it out the old people were standing in the line for hours and if it was soup, they came with the little dish, and would say please from the bottom so that there will be something - a piece of potato maybe or a string of something so for them it was real suffering."

“All we lived with from the start in Terezin, was the notion that in another two months the war will be over, they will close the gate and we go home . So in the meantime, there was such a surge of energy for the arts, which is quite normal if people are robbed of freedom, they want to be creative. And they were.”

“There were announcements there were programs, so every night you could actually be part of that life. The artistic life in Terezin.”

“The Germans knew full well that we are destined for death. It will happen anyhow and the smile will be wiped off our faces, so they thought, let them play music, let them play theater, let them dance so we were dancing under the gallows.”

“The strange thing is that we did not know where the transports went. The word Auschwitz, we didn't know, we didn't hear. That was unknown.”

“We were pushed into the cattle trucks and it was completely full, you could hardly breathe. People didn't move, they didn't talk very much. Everybody was thinking where are we going? What's ahead of us? And here is Raphael Schächter with a tin of sardines and he looked at me and said 'Zdenka, "here is my dish, here is bread, here are the sardines, and that will be my last supper.'" As though he knew.”

“In music, in acting, in conducting, in composing, if I ever lived in the most cultured and cultural surrounding, it was in Terezin amongst these people.”

Marianka:

“We just tried to reach something bigger than we are. And let's hope that we are singing to God and God can't help but hear us.”

“The train stopped at a small place called Bolshovizte, and from there we were walked endless, endless, endless country roads, two by two with all our luggage.”

“Of course there was no food. There wasn't more than solid food, of a cup full like this, some of it was just some kind of watery bits or whatever but the food that we swallowed - it was never quite enough.”

“By the time we were allowed to enter the special group of the people who were chosen for the Verdi requiem, we had nothing but gratitude for Rafi in our hearts, we aimed to please him. If anyone would have come in, a few Nazis with a few guns, who would have said stop immediately and get out of this building, or I'll shoot you all. There wouldn't have been one that would have left the building.”

"I had never in my life heard a requiem. I did not have any idea about the gorgeous beautiful music, I also didn't know more than two Latin words. And Rafi made very sure he would exactly translate into Czech the meaning of the words and Rafi told us the most important thing is how you feel when you sing this."

"I'm not so sure if I was hard of hearing but-I think my stomach stopped growling when I was singing. I think when you are more a soul than a person, I don't think that the soul has to be nourished by anything but heavenly music. The soul doesn't need anything else."

"This room became the protective wall of something good, something meaningful, something healing and and something that showed everyone who was really listening, that Rafi had put all of us, the singers and the audience into another world. This was not the world with the Nazis, this was our world."

"My mother was supposed to make signs with oil paint that had an arrow and say, to the library, to the coffee house, to the playground, she had no idea where this would go. That was used in Terezin to show the commission that we had a coffee house, we had a bank, we had a playground, we had everything."

"Without Rafi it wouldn't have happened, and we showed the world, we didn't know whether the world cared, but we proved beyond the shadow of any doubt, that yes, they have our bodies, yes, we have no more names, we have numbers, but they don't have our soul, our mind, our being, our what we are can not be taken away, also it will not be taken away at the moment we are shot."

"So, they came home to Switzerland and they said the Jews have it very good. They play funny operas and children's operas and the children play in playpens and in the marketplace they have beautiful swings and rocking horses. And in the afternoon-they have an afternoon nap in the grass, and when they wake up, they each get bread and butter. These are children who had never seen butter except that day. Deception is not the right word, there must be a worse word for that."

"If anybody would have come two weeks later, there was nothing left. Even the babies, the children's home was empty there with the baby carriages. It was empty, Small children age three to 6 or 8 or whatever there was no child left. The swings were gone, the playpens were gone, the rocking horses were gone and the children were gone. All went to the gas chambers. What did these children do to anybody?"

"I think I'm not a Holocaust survivor as much as a – you know, a requiem survivor. I didn't only survive the requiem; I got it as a present to take with me all my life."

Vera Schiff:

“And then we all went through the gates and I knew that life would never be the same.”

“The moment you open your eyes, the struggle began. It was the struggle for the day-by-day trivial needs. Wash yourself. Reach the latrines. We were converted from regular people to inmates.”

“The arrival of those artists who were willing to devote their talents to their and the inmates’ benefit made all the difference. To give us that flicker of hope in the hopeless black monotony of the camp day after day.”

“Death was a concept which we learned to live with. Death was omnipresent, it was everywhere.”

“These two hours you were taken back into the beautiful world which was once your own. The world of the tunes and of the melody which you are listening to and the message which was given to us by the performance. These were hours of pure joy. As much as you can call joy in camp.”

“Nothing, nothing was not planned. Everything... not a, not a corner was omitted to make it convincing. So you know, there was a soccer play... They picked out inmates who knew how to play soccer, so they played soccer. And even the commission passed by and a goal was scored. And that was... the scenario was written to perfection.”

“If the Germans would have known what was unfolding...if it was understood why Schacter had chosen this Verdi Requiem. If they would have known that Raphael was trying to tell them that they too will be judged one of these days for their crimes they committed on mankind. they would have really punished the artists.”

“We all have one very deep hope. That some of the people, Red Cross representatives, will ask a probing question. Because it was a beautifully quaint, little town what they showed them. But they never really did. I think they wanted to believe what they saw.”

“I think the great lesson of Theresienstadt... first of all, to see the highs and lows. The worst in man. And the best.”

Hana Krasa:

“It started that we had to wear the star. If you were found without it, you would be punished by being deported.”

“You forget where you are – you forget your surroundings. It’s like as if I was in a concert hall in Prague, and it didn’t matter where it was.”

“Well, my youngest son, who’s named after Raphi, came to me and said, “We want to honor our father and Raphi Schächter by singing in Terezin. And he wanted it as a surprise for their father. And I said, “Well, find out if you can before we do anything. So he called up Murry Sidlin and he talked it over with him and when he found out that he can, he said we are going to do it. At our age, I didn’t want any big surprises. I don’t know, maybe I’m silly. So once they came over for dinner and Rafi and Danny brought their score and they showed it to him and told him at that time we are going to sing the requiem.”

“It’s emotional but I am very very happy about it. I’m looking forward to the performance and the beautiful music and we will be together, so that’s good. They did not succeed. We survived.”

“There was only a piano, but for me it was like if the whole orchestra played...and it made us feel human.”

Edgar Krasa:

“He assessed immediately that a prison mentality might sink in, so he encouraged people after the assigned work was done to come to the basement and sing starting out with Czech popular songs.”

“This hour and a half or so shortened the time we had for brooding about our new lifestyle. And next day at work, we already occupied our mind looking forward to the evening to sing again.”

“In his mind he transformed it from the mass for the dead into mass for dead Nazis. And he wanted to tell them about the day of wrath coming, and the supreme judge sitting in judgment and no sinner will escape. And he couldn’t tell them in German, so he thought if he could sing it in Latin he may get away with it.”

“The Liberea me was “Liberate us from here.” That was like a prayer that overcame hunger and occasional pains. You were there in that cellar and you were a different person.”

“He had a great dilemma, Schächter he was a stickler for perfection. He didn’t like the composition of the chorus but it was a tremendous challenge, to have the Germans right there in front of him and tell them to their face...”

“Dies Irae even as a listener you feel is powerful. It represents a threat, and that you gladly would participate in as avenging whatever was done unto you.”

“There was no applause, but I'm sure the Swiss people were impressed. And the Germans were aware, that we were singing our own requiem, because they knew what they had in mind for us, whereas we did not.”

“After the visit of the International Red Cross every able-bodied person was deported. 19-thousand in five weeks, I knew that my time would come very soon.”

“Raphael Schächter had influence - a beneficial influence on thousands of people who have to thank him for giving them a bearable memory of Terezin.”