

INTERVIEW WITH JOSEF FREIHOF

When he was 92, Josef had some trouble remembering all details of his own story. So, his granddaughters, Carolina and Renata, helped him to recall some memories which he lived during Holocaust. Before the ending of this final course assignment, he died in October 15th 2016. This program commemorates him and eternalized his story so it will never be forgotten.

My name is Josef Freihof, Polish, I was born in 1924, in Crashnik, a small town and I didn't like it, because I used to imagine the world and an entire life. So, when I completed ten years old, I asked myself: "What am I doing here?"

Six millions Jews were murdered. Behind every single victim there is a story. "Nenhuma Ideia Vale Uma Vida", memories of Holocaust survivors.

On September 1st 1939, Germans invaded Poland. Josef, his parent and his seven siblings were sent to Crashnik ghetto. There, he had some friends and tried to forget the horror that was about to start in Jewish community.

My family was so beautiful. When the war came, the first thing they did in my town was to build a ghetto. The ghetto used to close at 6 pm; no one should be on the streets. I was independent, so I used to say "I'm not staying home, I'll meet my girlfriends, so we can talk", as nothing was happening.

Jews' deportation to concentration camps started and Crashnik ghetto started to be emptied. Josef was sent to Plaszow, in Poland. At the train station, some moments before his family goes away, he had an emotional farewell with his mother, who he would never see again.

We went to the train station. It was four kilometers from the city center. Then, I saw my mother inside the train. She was so smart. She notices I would defend myself, and she stood in a wood hole of the car... And then, she was gone. All of them were gone. And I...

In the concentration camp, Josef risked his life to eat more than once a day. He pretended to be a cripple in order not to be recognized and enter twice in the food's line. Hunger was one of the main torture methods Nazis used to dehumanize Jews.

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When I got there, I saw two chimneys. Then, I saw the food line. They gave us half potato and the rest was greenery, it didn't feed us. I made a plan: first, I'll eat and, afterwards, I'll enter in line again. How? This hand turned this way and I played the cripple, what should I do? No one recognized me; I put my head like this, ran and entered in line again. They gave me food and I ate it.

After Plaszow, Josef Freihof was sent to Grosrosen camp and was saved by Oskar Schindler, the most famous righteous among nations, a person who wasn't Jew and, even so, risked his life to save the ones who were. He was a businessman and hired more than a thousand Jews to work in his factory during Holocaust.

Well, I was a woodworker. I had my spot and fixed things. We assembled an officer.

In camps, Jews were marked with numbers in their skin. These tattoos are remembered as a Holocaust symbol. In order not to be recognized when he left the camp, Josef decided to put off his mark.

I used to have a girlfriend, Pupi, she was beautiful... She said: "If you want to run away, we will". This was in Poland. She said: "You need to take it off"... So I put it off. Because if you have nothing, no one will say you were a prisoner.

Carol (granddaughter): But you put it off with your teeth?

Sure, in the same time.

Renata (granddaughter): How this tattoo was made?

With an ink pen. Nothing hurts in this kind of situation.

Although being exploited by Nazis and seeing the worst that happened in Holocaust, Josef says he feared nothing. His secret was to stay away from electric fences that limited the concentration camps.

I wasn't afraid, because there was nothing to be afraid of, everything was electrized. If you get too close, you die. When there was some work to do, I was always chosen. I didn't fear a thing.

After WWII, he heard the news about his family who was in Brazil. His uncles sent him money and a passage and ensured he would have a job in the country. In Rio de Janeiro, he met Fenny, his future wife.

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She was there, with her short dress, staring at me. I don't know who invited the other to dance, but we danced together. I learn from her that, in Brazil, we need to be careful with women, because in Paris we also had this fan thing. She put her fan in my pocket. When I got home, I saw it. How was I supposed to give her back? Someday after, I met her and gave the fan back. Now we are here, with fan in hands.

With 92 years old, Josef remembers the love and teaching of her mother. Every year, he celebrated two special dates.

I have a wonderful temperament. My mother taught me, before opening your mouth, don't say anything, you need to listen first. So, I am a very good listener, I don't discuss with anyone. I have two birthdays. Mine, May 5th, and when war ended for me, May 8th.

This interview was recorded in June 2016, in Rio de Janeiro. Four months after, in October 15th, Josef Freihof died. Her granddaughters remember him by what he appreciated most: freedom.

Sometime ago, grandpa told me that when he was released from war, he used to travel in train ceiling, feeling the wind of freedom in his face. That's how I imagine him now, traveling to meet his parents and his seven sisters that were murdered in Holocaust.