

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS VENETIANER

My name is Thomas Venetianer, I was born in a country that no longer exist, but it was called Czechoslovakia and there I spent almost the whole period of Second World War, until being deported to the camp of Terezin.

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

Thomas' family had a typical European life. His father was a pharmaceutical and her mother, accouter. When he was one, Hungarians occupied their country and, in 1942, handed Czechoslovakia to the Nazis. They were Jews, so, the needed to run away and try to hide.

In 1942, they had already made a deal with Slovakia to give the Jews in. The Slovakian Jews were the first one to go to Auschwitz and, obviously, were murdered. We stayed at the Hungarian side and, in Hungary; Germans did nothing until the begging of 1944. That was when we ran away and hide, but it wasn't worth it, because we got caught by Gestapo.

Nazis treated Jews as they were animals. A proof was that deportations were made in cattle cars. In their way to death, prisoners couldn't even seat.

Cleanliness in cars like this was a bucket, where people did their basic needs. I, probably by disgust, could not do it in front of lots of other people. Every time the train stopped, a Nazi officer opened the door to aerate the car and to throw away the bucket's content. And, what was even more horrible, some people died in there of cardiac diseases or suicide. So, they took of the bodies.

Terezin was a model camp. So, the prisoners used to receive more food than in other camps. Germans needed to proof to Red Cross that prisoners were in good conditions.

Germans made up Terezin. It was a German invention: they transformed that city in a model of a place where Jews would be well dressed and well fed to mislead that they were in a great camp, living very well. During the war, the camp routine was filmed to show to the Red Cross, the only institution allowed to visit camps. The daily routine was absolutely boring, since no one tried to escape, we were unleashing... The camp was very big. Terezin was a fort, so, you couldn't escape...

But the kids were free, you know? They could walk, play, and do whatever they wanted to. Even though, that cold wasn't good to play.

Although Nazis provided more food and clothes to prisoners in Terezin, the psychological torture was in the details. Thomas remembers that the hygiene in the concentration camp was almost inexistent.

Bathrooms were primitives. Obviously, water was cold, when it was enough, because, sometimes, you started the bath and, suddenly, water stopped falling. And we didn't have anything to dry ourselves, people used rags, I don't know what they did. The camp was released by the soviet army, the Russians. We didn't leave the camp immediately, because they didn't have transportation.

Thomas can't recall any characteristic sound of the concentration camp. Although the lack of any kind of noise marked his time in Terezin.

Terezin was very quiet. There weren't any special sounds because... Well, in first place, because adults were working. So, during the day, it was hard to see adult at street, you could only see kids. Usually kids make noise, but I don't remember noisy kids. I don't know why, but a child in these conditions doesn't behave the same way as a normal child. After going through all this, you become a quiet, always afraid that something bad might happen if you scream or do something that calls a guard attention.

The end of the war was close, so, the Nazis started to evacuate the concentration camps. That was when they created the "Death Marches": the prisoners were supposed to walk in line until getting where Germans wanted; even there wasn't a real destination. The truth is that those ways were created so Jews that still alive run out their last strength.

The death march from Sachsenhausen to other place in Germany had almost 50 thousand prisoners alive and my dad was one of them. My dad was extremely weak. When he got home, he was a 42 year old man weighing 94.8 pounds. Nazis who monitored the marches had instruction to kill any prisoner who tried to stop. My dad fell of weakness and stood like this for three days. He was lucky because the Red Cross, who knew about the death marches, followed some of them and found him. Probably, the ambulance behind the march saw him moving and saved his life.

Thomas and his family came to Brazil in 1948. Even though he was far away from where everything happened, he took some time to understand where he was living - some trauma chased him for years. Others never disappeared.

When I saw a policeman or a soldier, I panicked. The idea that a man in a uniform was bad was so strong. This fear only ceased when I was 14, 15. But the bigger problems were starve and cold. Because, in camp, we didn't have appropriated clothes or blankets, we didn't have anything to warm us, we didn't have showers or a place to take a warm shower, you know? So, I still have problems with cold. Until today, I'm very chilly.

Thomas Venetianer had a very lucky path. Few Jews survived the Holocaust's death industry. Because he is one of them, Tom dedicates his life to report the horrors he lived. What is his purpose? To avoid that genocide like that one happens again.

Who died weren't numbers. Sometimes this "6 million" is shocking, for me is shocking, but there were 6 million lives. Each one of them had a life and they simply, from a moment to other, were annihilated. This is the strongest memory and why it can't be forgotten.