The Holocaust And The Creative Spark

“Remembered Voices”, a new documentary from NET Television is about the Holocaust. It is not about death. It is about life, and more specifically the eternal life gained through the staying power of artistic expression. Ultimately this is a film about humanity. The Holocaust is not only horrific because six million Jews were murdered. It is tragic because humans denied the humanity of other humans killing 6-million people for being Jewish. And they murdered 11-million more for being Communists, disabled, homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, or any other group the Nazis determined to be a threat. The lessons of the Holocaust ultimately are about humanity, or more specifically about “man’s inhumanity to man.”

When considering lessons of the Holocaust, I often think of my friend Sasha. Sasha is a Holocaust survivor who, who came every year to speak to the 9th graders at the Temple I served in California. Still today, one piece of Sasha’s story that sticks with me is the fact that he was barely a teenager himself, no older than
the students in that room. And he would laugh as he talked about the mischief he got into. He told how when he and his friends had kitchen duty, they would take the horse meat they were given and they substituted it for the steak which was meant for the SS officers. He and his counterparts would laugh as the gobbled down the steaks. He talked about tearing apart coffins to make beds above the cold ground and that they would stand guard as each took turns napping while they were supposed to be on work detail. I will never forget, I asked him, how they were brave enough to get into mischief in the middle of a concentration camp? What if you got caught?

“Of course if we got caught,” he would say. “It was curtains for us. But we didn’t think about that. We were just kids.”

I have always been amazed by this. In the middle of all of this dehumanization and death, kids were still just kids. I think such a story is a testament to the fact that you cannot kill the human spirit. Kids will be kids. People will be people. “Remembered Voices” focuses on this idea. Even in the depths of the most
dehumanizing of places, there stirs within the human soul the urge to express and to create. No matter what, artists will be artists.

As we are about to learn, Terezin held a large number of creative people, most of whom were ultimately murdered. Miraculously, much of their art lived on. The program lets us see how the art which emerged from Terezin has reached across the decades to teach and to inspire children and artists of the 21st century. "Remembered Voices" is not about understanding why something so horrific as the Holocaust happened. Rather, it is about the deeper lessons we learn when we tend to the creative spark which resides in us all. It is about finding the common thread which binds us all together, all people, nations, races, religions, and genders in the brotherhood of man.

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