

WE MUST NEVER FORGET

The Holocaust — first the numbers. Between 1933 and 1945 the fascist Nazi regime and their collaborators murdered by design at least 6 million Jewish people, 5 million Slavs, 3 million Poles, 200,000 Romani people, 250,000 mentally or physically disabled people, 9,000 homosexual men. If we take a lens to zoom in on each one of those numbers we will find a woman, a man, a child viciously ripped from existence in the human race.

There are many commemorations of this horrible event around the world. The most well-known are Yom HaShoah, this year beginning on May 1st for the Jewish community, and International Holocaust Remembrance Day, established by the United Nations, on January 27, which is this Sunday.





As I have written before, my visit to the Children's Memorial at Yad Vashem just outside of Jerusalem, had a potent and lasting impact on me. In this hollowed out underground cavern, a visitor hears the names read aloud of the 1.5 million Jewish children who perished during the Holocaust. You also hear each child's age and country of origin.

Latter that day I visited the nearby *Hall of Names*. There, with the help of a couple of young interns from the International School for Holocaust Studies, I was able to make what I had seen and heard more personal by looking up information collected on a couple of dozen children murdered in the death camps who were born the same year that I was born. Through the years I have thought about them often. It is as if I wanted to reach out and share experiences in my life that they had been robbed of. And, truth be told, on occasion it does feel like we are having a conversation. I would like to tell you something about one of my "classmates."

Baroukh–Raoul Bentitou was born in Palikao, Algeria, which at that time was a part of France. Baroukh was one of eight children. The Jewish population of Algeria was about 120,000. Seeking a better life for his family Baroukh's father moved them to Marseille, in France. The Germans invaded France in May, 1940. They occupied all of northern France but allowed French collaborators to control most of the South where Baroukh lived. These collaborators were very energetic in persecuting Jews.

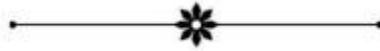


On January 23, 1943 Baroukh's father and his two older brothers were arrested and deported to a death camp where they were gassed. Baroukh, who was then 11, was sent to live at a children's home in Izieu. The staff was sympathetic to the children who were sent there. But this ended in April 1944. Klaus Barbie, often referred to as "The Butcher of Lyons" decided it was time to get rid of the Jewish children at the home. Baroukh and most of his friends were sent to the Auschwitz death camp in Poland. He perished in the gas chamber just after his 13th birthday.

An infuriating postscript to this horrible story is that Barbie escaped punishment after the

war because he was working as a spy for the American government! He was living quite splendidly in South America but eventually was sent back to France for trial. In 1987 Barbie was found guilty of “crimes against humanity” and sentenced to life in prison.

Back to Baroukh. I think of what I was doing at 13 — leaving grade school and thinking about my future life. What were you doing?



Terezin concentration camp, “Theresienstadt” was a phony ghetto existing toward the end of the war — 1942–1945. It was constructed in German occupied Czech lands to cover up Nazi genocide. It had a high proportion of artists, musicians, and intellectuals. It was all a lie. But fascists always seem to believe they can cover up anything with lies. It was even termed “Hitler's gift to the Jews.” In 1944 the International Red Cross was allowed to inspect this “model ghetto.” Everything was very controlled. Special concerts had been arranged along with art exhibits, etc. Well-dressed children were seen playing. Only the Nazis knew that every one of the inhabitants was condemned to die.



There were 15,000 children under the age of 15 who passed through this camp. Less than 100 survived. A great many of the inhabitants of the camp were shipped out to Auschwitz and certain death the day after the Red Cross committee left.

Pavel Friedmann was a teenager in Theresienstadt. He wrote a poem that has become quite well known. The translator of this poem is unknown, at least to me.

THE BUTTERFLY

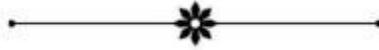
*The last the very last,
So richly, brightly, dazzling the yellow
Perhaps if the sun's tears could sing
against a white stone . . .*

*Such, such a yellow
Is carried lightly 'way up high.*

*It went away I'm sure because it wished to
kiss the world goodbye.*

*For seven weeks I've lived in here,
Pinned up inside this ghetto
But I have found my people here.
The dandelions called to me
And the white chestnut candles in the court.
Only I never saw another butterfly.*

*That butterfly was the last one.
Butterflies don't live in here,
In the ghetto.*



We must never forget!

Brother Toby