

Holocaust Survivors

Introduction

MYP 5 is a very specific year for the students. Not only because it is the last year before entering to IB programme and students feel that one stage of their life is slowly coming to an end, but also because all students have to create a Personal Project. Students have to create and present unique work which depends on their personal interests, knowledges and skills. Finally they have analyse their work in an essay.

I didn't have big problems to choose the topic of my Personal Project. If I can tell truth, I knew it for maybe two years already. Even though i would like to study medicine in the future, I like to talk to the old people, or just to sit and to hear their real life stories.

Especially the stories of Holocaust survivors. And I also knew, that the only people able to help me with this, are my grandparents. My 82 years old grandfather Fridrich and my 76 years old grandmother Elvira¹.

Since the beginning I knew, that I want to create a short movie. I also knew, that for me it will not be only a Personal Project, it will be more. It will be something very special and very personal, it will be the memory of them during my whole life. Who knows, maybe next generations of the family will be, thanks to my movie, also proud of this two special people, who are, thanks God, still alive.

But this is not the main reason why I decided to create the movie about the Holocaust survivors. I made the movie because I want teenagers of all Slovakian High Schools to know, that Holocaust really existed and to understand, why Holocaust should never be repeat again. Here are some citation from the books, I read, about this topic. „Ignorance and denial are two of the causes as to why history repeats itself. Many people deny that the Holocaust ever existed, which is something, that numerous teens responded to with shock and horror. Even there is proof: the remains of the concentration camps, the gas chambers, the pictures, the loss of family members, the pain, and of course, the survivors. How could someone deny the Holocaust when there's proof everywhere"³?

I was very lucky with choice of my supervisors. Nobody would be better than Mr.Vladimir Crmoman and Mr.Martin Korcok. Without their great advises I wouldn't be able to make my movie. Finally I was lucky that Edah Foundation led by Mr.Martin Korcok helped my with financing of my movie.

My goal

As I wrote already, my main goal in this project was to let all young people know, that Holocaust really existed and there are still, unfortunately not many, alive Holocaust survivors. I decided that my film should be used as an educational material for young people and it can be part of the subject History for High School.

To make a movie is very creative thing on one side, but very difficult on the other site. Especially to make a movie based on an interview with two not healthy old people. And also I know, that nobody from this people likes to talk about the most difficult part of their young life. Because of this I decided together with my supervisors, that the movie should be short, should take around 10 minutes.

In June 23rd 2014 I presentd during Mini Fair my poster, where I clearly described the goal of my topic. Then, after returning from summere holidays, in August 2014, I started to work on it seriously.

Before achieving my goal - Sources (Application of informations)

First, in May 2014, I refreshed my knowledge of Holocaust. I read again the book Tragedy of Slovak Jews⁴, The Encyklopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust² and The Holocaust³. I would repeat one of many definitions of Holocaust. „The Holocaust, a Greek word, which means “sacrifice by fire”, was the systematic, state sponsored persecution and murder of about six million Jews by the Nazi regime“².

Wolfgang Benz, professor of Holocaust research works in the University in Berlin. He clearly in his book of Holocaust explained everything about Holocaust with causes, evidences, particular numbers³.

„The Slovak Jewish Codes was issued by the Slovak government in 1941. It was one of the biggest liquidation of Jews in the world . It included all the Nazi´s Anti-Jewish decrees. Austria, Hungary , France, Slovakia and other European countries deported Jews to the concentration camps. The massive deportations started in 1941 and continued until 1945. In the final last months Jews were deported to concentration camps by trains for cattle or on marches called „death marches“. It was untill May 1945, when World War II officially ended in Europe“⁴.

„about 70,000 Jews were deported from Slovakia and about 65,000 thousand were murdered“⁴.

I found lot of informations on Internet also. Sered was concentration camp in Slovakia. It was established in 1941 as a labor camp for Jews which were called „Working Group. In 1944 after the Slovak National Uprising, when many Jews left this camp and joined partisans, 13 500 Jews were deported to Auschwitz and Theresienstadt. This camp was liberated in April 1, 1945 by Soviet Army⁷.

Theresienstadt was concentration camp in northern Bohemia which was used by Nazi Germany. It was mainly a transit camp for Jews from western Europe. From 144 000 Jews sent to this camp, around 33 000 found their death there and 88 000 were deported to Auschwitz. This camp was liberated in May 8, 1945 by Soviet Army⁸.

I read also about Holocaust survivors from all around the world even I do not know them personally^{9,12}. I read the interview made with profesor Pavel Traubner, Holocaust survivor and friend of my parents and granparents. „My tattered sweater, which you can find in Jewish Community Museum in Bratislava, was the only one I wore as a child in hiding for months in the winter of 1944-45“¹⁰.

I watched DVD about Holocaust survivors published by USC Shoah Foundation Institute in 2008. It is very sad but interesting testimony of Mrs. Schwalbova, Mr. Bachnar and Mrs. Svobodova. All of them are Holocaust survivors⁵.

I also watched DVD „We saw the Holocaust“ which was published by Milan Simecek Nadation in 2002. It is an educational material about 21 people talking about worst part of their life⁶.

The last and most important source were my grandparents, the main actors of the movie¹.

Achieving my goal

After my knowledge was sufficient I started in August 2014 to write questions, I used later in my interviews. During that time I was thinking to talk except my grandparents to two other Holocaust survivors. I rang profesor Traubner¹⁰ and 95 years old lady Mrs. Schikova from Banovce nad Bebrava¹¹. They agreed to answer my questions. So I talked to them and asked them.

In the end of August 2014 I had a meeting with my supervisor Mr. Korcok, who works in Jewish Museum in Bratislava. We sat together around 2 hours to decide what I will do exactly. I met also the cameraman Mr. Dubravsky. And the problem started, because to make a movie is very expensive. Finally I decided together with Mr. Korcok and Mr. Dubravsky, that I will do interview with my grandparents only.

I had several more meetings with Mr. Dubravsky. He recommended me what should I wear during the interview and when exactly will be the filming. I was very excited.

I had another meeting with Mr. Korcok. We talked about the questions I should ask my grandparents. The questions should be easy and understandable for young people in my age.

I visited my grandparents on my own. They started to talk about their life. On one site I enjoyed it, on the other site I was very sad to hear about it. Here are some citations.

„I remember the train which took us to Sered. I didn't understand why so many people, marked with yellow star, had to go... I knew lots of them. Mom said me, that the reason is, that we are Jews“¹ „I remember Sered quite well. My father worked in carpentry shop. I was around 10-11 years old. Once I played outside in between the barracks. I tried to imagine that a stone is a ball and I kicked into it. In one moment a man came in Nazi uniform and stood next to me. He started to yell something in German language, similar to „kleine Judische Schwein“ and hit me with whip. I fell down and I remember only cry of my mom. This man was a camp chief commander Alois Brunner. Since that time I was afraid even to talk“¹ „In 1944 I was deported together with my parents to Theresienstadt. My father was very sick during that time. We traveled many days in the train for cattle without food, water, toilets. Some people died on the

way there“¹. „there were lots of Czech, Holland, Danish, Slovak Jews there. I turned 13 in Theresienstadt. It means in Jewish religion that a boy becomes a man. It is called Bar Mizvah. A Danish Rabbi Fridiger, who was also a prisoner there, arranged for me secretly a small Bar Mizvah in Theresienstadt. As a gift he gave me a book Pesach Hagada with his dedication. This book is the most precious thing I have and once it will be your brother’s and yours“¹.

6th of September 2014 was a day D. In the morning my mom drove me to my grandparents house. Both of them were very nervous. But how nervous was I. Because we had still time, we started to talk again. Then my grandfather decided better to hear some good music than to talk again and again about the same topic. He chose his beloved band ABBA. My grandma laughed. Then before 10 AM we ate light breakfast. And than Mr.Korcok and Mr.Dubravsky came. After introduction and conversation we started to move furniture in the room. We moved the couch and armchairs to the wall. In between, cameraman Mr. Dubravsky, prepared his big camera and lighting. Then came the first flap. I sat between grandparents. I had to introduce them. All the time I held their hands. I felt very special. After that my grandfather started to talk. I asked him questions. Mainly about his childhood and about that time he was in concentration camp in Sered and Terezin. He spoke fluently and I can say his memory is very good. I had goosebumps even I heard his story couple times. Especially when he talked about his Bar Mizvah in Terezin and about guardsman named Cingel. I felt to cry. He was a boy that time. I am sure I would not survive this hell. It were also funny situations during filming. Some parts were filmed many time. For example my grandma was supposed to answer the question were she mat grandfather first time with one sentence only. But she always said 3 sentences. When Mr. Dubravsky filmed her 10th time and she said finally said the sentence correctly, he wanted to scream from happiness. In that moment she added „in Banovce“. So he had to repeat it again. We finished everything around 2.30 PM. Then we had some food and talked. It was very successful day. I felt very happy.

During next weeks I started to collect pictures of my grandparents, their parents and of me, especially me and my grandparents, me and my parents and from my Bar Mizvah. In November 2014 I had a meeting with Mr.Dubravsky in his studio again. We chose music, classical one, which we used as a background. We chose also some more photos from winter nature and from concentration camp in Sered. With big help of Mr Dubravsky we held images, some of them we cut out, to make around 10 minutes long movie. Finally he helped me to put subtitles there.

In November 15th 2014 I had a last meeting with Mr.Korcok and Mr. Dubravsky in Mr.Dubravsky’s studio. I took my mom with me. My mom saw the movie for the first time.

She cried. I was sad, because this interesting work together with that two nice people reached the end.

My goal is achieved (Reflection on Learning)

I know already that something useful was done. I can say, it was very difficult but interesting work. I tried to make something very special.

I had the possibility to spend hours with both my grandparents. We just sat and talked.

I learned a lot. I learned how to collect and use informations from talking with them.

I refreshed my knowledge from history, from Holocaust period. I had to read books, watch movies about Holocaust survivors and find informations through Internet. I learnt how to make a real movie, how to choose for movie suitable pictures and music, how to put subtitles into it.

Conclusion

To make my Personal Project about Holocaust Survivors took lot of my time. But I really enjoyed it. I am happy that I had this possibility. And I am sure young people will also, thanks to my movie, understand, what does it mean Holocaust. And they will understand that Holocaust really existed.

My grandparents were also, once upon a time, young, same age like we are today. They were also teenagers. But instead of spending time with friends, having fun, watching movies and eating popcorn they had to hide and suffer. They didn't do anything wrong. It happened to them only, because they are Jews.

Before the end I would like to thank to my supervisors Mr. Crmoman, Mr. Korcok and Mr. Dubravsky for their big help. As well as big thank you to Edah Foundation.

I decided to finish my essay with the citation from the book Tragedy of Slovak Jews:

„Holocaust was the highest level of racism. It should never be forgotten and it should never be repeated again“⁴.

Appendix

Sources

List with sources