

Restoring, Educating, Commemorating

From a young age, I was particularly attracted to a place that breathed mystery, arousing my childish curiosity. I did not understand where I was, what suburbium was , or who the Jews were. The buildings were empty, devastated, the walls tattered. I was 8 years old when I asked my mother at the memorial during an event, "are we Jews too?" As I grew, something grew with me. It was an interest in knowing the roots of the ancestors. The past, which made its way to me and spoke to me like this, became a part of me. Also great-grandmother Schonberger and our family's secret.

As I grew up, suburbium changed its form, matured into beauty. In the hall, a pomegranate with seeds appeared on the ceiling, a wooden floor. In the study, a daisy and old books marked by time. The vaults of the synagogue lit up with beautiful colors from within, on Aron HaKodesh added a red wig embroidered with gold thread. Added candlesticks - menorah , chanukiah . However, the space was no longer filled by praying Jews, but by display cases that store the objects of their daily life - wedding rings, spices, cutlery, toys, prayer straps with their terrible secret, kippahs , thales . Mikveh and Bet also came to life in beauty HaMidrash . After years of restoration, this complex of buildings necessary for the life of the community has literally become a jewel that attracts the attention of tourists from all over the world.

However, the past cannot be returned, revived. But it can be maintained and that is up to us young people. Jewish heritage has become our cultural heritage with its spiritual legacy. I also joined the organization of events that help preserve and develop awareness of the Bardejov Jewish community. Today, education and commemoration itself can be realized through experiential, project-based learning, which is also connected with oral history. Through it, we record the stories of survivors, which can tell us a lot about times, people, good and bad, heroism and fear, and hope. Those who were lucky and survived the horrors of the camps, or were hidden, are decreasing. In a moment there will be no one left. It is all the more valuable if we manage to record such a story. We are working on one right now.

"It was September 1944, when my father was a member of the Gestapo. He was our neighbor. We had no idea what would follow. I remember his last words as he lifted the old blue blanket off the couch. He looked up, first looking at me with such a pitiful look full of sadness,

but also fear. Then he looked at his mother. I saw how he gave her a loving look . Daddy loved Mommy very much. He confessed all his love for her in one look. As if all the hustle and bustle that was taking place had died down for a while. I saw only love and peace. From the look, I blamed him for trying to calm mom down. After a while, he got the words out. "I will come back." Everyone in the room knew what the truth would be. I really wanted to be wrong, but fate arranged it differently. I now know that my father's only crime was that he was Jewish. He was forcibly taken to the camp and shot. Allow me to introduce myself and let's work together to prevent this terrible past from happening again.

My name is Ján Reichner . Although we were like a Catholic family, our Jewish origin could not be denied. Father was baptized, but over time it became clear that his baptismal certificate was fake. Mom came from a Christian family. I too was baptized and ministered as a child. But as they say, you can't fool the genes. We did not avoid the fate that awaited other Jewish families in Bardejov. I didn't have a peaceful childhood, even when dad was still with us, hatred was everywhere. I was four years old when our neighbor, our close friend, betrayed us. He pointed his finger at dad in the middle of the square. Oh, that's a Jew! And so the Gestapo arrested him. We had five minutes to say goodbye, dad was only allowed to take one blanket with him. I know that they were all subsequently taken to one house, right next to the household goods in the square. Since I was still small, my mother took me with her to see my father. They were guarded by guards. I saw how my father and the others were loaded into the car and driven towards Prešov.

One early morning, the Gestapo and an interpreter came to us. A German came up to me and put a machine gun to my head. I held my breath, the blood froze in my body. He asked me if my name was Ján Reichner , my mother knew German. But the interpreter was a good guy, he said to my mother: "Madame, try to disappear as soon as possible, because in a week they will come for you too. He's a Jewish kid."

And so began our hiding and chasing time. We met many good people with a heart on the palm of their hand, with a strong moral compass. Their courage and desire to help was stronger than the fear of possible detection. Mom quickly prepared an escape plan. She hired Mr. Vanta , who had a wagon and a horse. At night we went to Fintice. But before that, a man from Bardejov, I think Ladislav Čižmárik, furnished us with false documents . In Finticy, we hid in the cellar of friends. Since the Gestapo was still looking for us, we went to the basement of Mr. Majoroš's house

in Prešov. Mom came out here and there to cook dinner, our traditional food - pies. We were just about to eat when they started bombing Prešov. We didn't have time to go down to the cellar, we only crawled under the bed. The bombs damaged the city. At Kalvária, my mother had a friend, Mr. Grosmannová and her husband were also taken away. We were at her place for a while. Days passed and suddenly the Red Army appeared. We returned to Bardejov where life without father was difficult. We learned that dad was shot on the death march. I helped mom as much as I could, but that's another story."

Fish , a native of Bardejov, who, as a child, was also loaded into a cattle truck headed for the Bergen-Belsen death camp is also extremely valuable . However, he did not resent his city. In 2005, he founded the Committee for the Rescue of Bardej . Jew. heritage and helped with the construction of the Holocaust Memorial-Garden. The financial donations provided by the natives materialized into a concrete form that resembles Jerusalem Street with the facades of the houses on the outside of the monument. The author of the idea is G. Solár .

The interior, in the form of black tombstones with carved names of the murdered, takes us back to the past and reminds us of their fate sealed by the Holocaust. It talks about those who were once part of the city and contributed to its prosperity. Where Jews and non-Jews coexisted in respect and reverence. Names like Gutmann , Landau , Rosenwasser , Lôwy , Friedmann sounded in the streets ... However, the day came when the Jewish Code, Arization, deportations came into force. It reminds us of the darkness that ended the lives of 83% of the community members in 1942 with its bloodthirsty hands. The Star of David in a light-dark version, placed on the rails, became a symbol of the intermingling of darkness and hope.

The memorial is also a resting place for those who do not have a grave. We remember, we remind, we place a pebble, we light candles. It is a memento of evil for us, how far a person can go in his hatred. But at the same time, it is also a place where the courage of the fearless - the righteous from Bardejov is immortalized. It is a testimony of humanity that showed us that it makes sense to fight evil.

All these restored buildings dressed in new clothes, where the spiritual and social life of the community took place, are now empty and silent. They are a kind of chasm in the conscience of humanity, which can only be overcome by spreading light and goodness. We will speak,

document, publish, and protect the message so that nothing like this ever happens again! We won't let you forget.

The genius of loci – the spirit of the place remained and watches, protects and warns.

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