

IN HONOUR OF HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Here is my story of my incredible encounter with Holocaust Survivors.
It's amazing how our Creator works.

Project: 168 Hour Film Project
<http://www.168project.com>

Credit: Produced, Directed, Filmed, Graphics, and Edited by Frank Lozano

On 13th February 2008, David Berek Forberg changed my life forever and, from what I understand now from their children, I helped to change his. While on a cruise ship in the Panama Canal, there was this beautiful couple searching for a place to sit in the shade, when Mr. Forberg sat at the table where I was eating. His wife, who sat at a table NEXT to mine, leaned over and said to me, "Oh, he's going to talk your ear off", referring to her husband. I chuckled at the sweet sound of her raspy Jewish grandmother voice and I said, "Excuse me?" (Mostly because I wanted to hear her speak again.) "My husband", she said, "He's going to talk your ear off". I asked her why and it was the moment my world's view changed forever when she said. "He's 86 and I am 84. We met 65 years ago in a concentration camp!"

As you can imagine, my heart sank to my feet instantaneously when I heard those words. Never in my life have I met anyone who had actually gone through the Holocaust, much less had an opportunity to speak with them. With a gulp in my throat, I said to Mrs. Forberg, "I can't imagine what you've gone through". She replied, "I can't even talk about it, because it hurts me too much". An hour and a half later, she and David, BOTH, were still talking about it.

As a novice documentary filmmaker, you can imagine how I wished that I had the cameras rolling the moment she parted her aged lips and began telling her story. That night, after hearing about the awful things the Nazi soldiers did to people during the War, I knew I had to tell the Forberg story. I wondered HOW I could pull off such a task, since I was on vacation with almost no professional gear to make a movie.

Mr. and Mrs. Forberg were both born in Poland - David in Częstochowa in 1922 and Sima in Opatów in 1924. Their story is unique, because they are Holocaust survivors who "met" in a concentration camp. David's parents, Abraham and Sarah Forberg, together with his siblings Miriam and Joseph, were all killed. Sima's parents, Chana and Wolf Jurkowski, along with seven siblings, were also all murdered. Some went to the ovens of Treblinka.

The following day, at breakfast, I searched for this beautiful couple and found them in the dining hall. I knelt beside Mr. and Mrs. Forberg and asked them for their permission to capture their story on film. Mr. Forberg began telling me about how the soldiers made him clean blood from their boots after killing babies. I had to stop him and say, "Not now Mr. Forberg, not now", I chuckled. It was obvious that he wanted to talk about his experience and I was all but ready to listen to him.

David told me that they had been filmed by some "other" filmmaker talking about the Holocaust. David asked his wife Sima, "Honey, what was his name?". She replied, "Spielberg, Steven Spielberg". Mr. Forberg asked me, "Do you know Steven?" I almost choked when I heard her say that iconic filmmaker's name. You see, in 1994, Steven Spielberg founded the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (original title), a non-profit organisation established to record video testimonies of survivors and other witnesses of the Holocaust. Between 1994 and 1999, the Foundation

conducted nearly 52,000 interviews in 56 countries and in 32 languages and the Forbergs had been the subjects one of those interviews.

The next day, with the assistance of the cruise director of the MSC Lirica, the cruise ship we were travelling on, we began filming. I asked if I could use their stage, with its single spotlight, so I could film David and Sima as soon as possible - and that's what we did. While the rest of the passengers left the ship for the Dominican Republic, I opted to stay and listen to the Forberg story, one for which I was not prepared. After another hour and a half of listening to their stories of pain, suffering and anguish, I knew that God Himself had put us together for a reason. And I was sure it was because I was entering a Christian filmmaking competition that has a yearly theme. In 2008, the theme was "FREE THE CAPTIVES". How perfect was that for the Forberg story?

A few days later, while we were disembarking the ship in Miami, Mr. and Mrs. Forberg were separated from their travelling caregiver, Myra. I spotted the frantic couple in the foyer of the ship and asked them what was wrong. They explained that Myra had been taken by immigration and they did not know why. Mr. Forberg was just shy of screaming. "Where have they taken her? What are they doing to her? Where will we see her? Why are they doing this?" Well, now that they were my newest friends, I felt like they were "my" responsibility also and I did my best to calm Mr. Forberg by telling him that I would find out what was going on and come back with a report.

In that moment, I had not put together his panic and the fact that Myra had been "taken away" with his experience of the Holocaust. It turns out that, because David and Sima had a Canadian passport and Myra's was from the Philippines, it was standard procedure and nothing to be alarmed about. They would all meet on the dock when everybody disembarked. I did my best to explain all of this to Mr. Forberg, telling him, "Trust me, everything is going to be alright". That's when Mr. Forberg looked me straight in the eye and said with a very stern voice, "YOUNG MAN, DO YOU KNOW HOW MANY TIMES SOMEBODY LOOKED ME IN THE EYE AND SAID 'TRUST ME', THEN THEY TAKE YOU OUT IN THE YARD AND SHOOT YOU IN THE HEAD?"

What could I say? I was left speechless. At that moment, it was that I TRULY felt the impact that the concentration camp experience had left on David and Sima and all those who had survived it. No, I could NOT relate to such an awful concept that life for a person in the concentration camps could be taken at any second and I then understood why they would not, COULD NOT, trust anyone!

I stayed with the Forbergs until we all, together, found Myra on the dock. Their reunion brought comfort to David. I asked him if I could come to their house and film MORE, knowing that there was more to their story which I just had to get. David said, "Yes, any time". Sima was all too happy to give me their contact information while we hugged and said our goodbyes and welcomed me whenever I wanted. Little did they know that I was talking about flying back to Los Angeles from our Miami location, getting the rest of my filmmaking gear and coming right back, since I was only on vacation and did not have the proper tools which I needed to make a film.

Within a few short days, I spoke to Honey and Esther, two of the Forberg daughters asking their permission to continue to film their parents. After a few days of uncertainty from the girls, I was not confident that the girls would allow me to continue filming their parents. I remember Esther asking me, "What's in it for you?" and "How much do you plan on making with this film?". While I understood her concerns, that was the furthest thing from my mind. I just wanted to tell their incredible story! Esther and the family finally agreed that I could come to Miami and film the rest of the story. By week's end, I was in Miami and all set to film David and Sima at their winter home in Sunny Isles Beach, a suburb of Fort Lauderdale.

Arriving late on a Saturday, I stopped at a random pizza parlour to enjoy some late night dinner, when I noticed a map on the wall. It was a huge wall-sized map with the usual landmarks on it. But this one had something which I had not expected. There was a landmark which said "HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL". How could that be? I thought that, surely this was not a map of Miami. I asked the guy behind the pizza counter, "What is this map of?" He looked at me like I was from out of town, which I was. He said, "Miami". I asked again, because I did not think he heard my question, "No, no, this map, what city is this of?" Now he looked at me like I was from out of this country when he said, "It's Miami! Why?" I said to him, "Well, it says here Holocaust Memorial". He explained that it was only a few blocks from where we were standing. I could not believe that I had flown to Miami to make a film about Holocaust survivors and that I had NO IDEA that there was one of the largest and, certainly, most emotionally powerful Holocaust memorials in the country just blocks away.

The next morning, at sunrise, I went to the memorial which was closed and spoke to the security guard. I told him what I was doing in Miami - he actually opened the gate for me to film and asked that I simply forget his name and face. To this day, I am so grateful for his assistance. I then went to the Forberg home and met the girls and their husbands. I enjoyed a fabulous brunch and began filming right away.

By day's end of hearing story after heartbreaking story, we all went to dinner. The next day, Monday, I flew home to Los Angeles arriving at 8:00pm. By 4:00am that following day (Tuesday), I was back on the road again to Las Vegas for more filming and to meet with the Forbergs again, as they already had a stay planned there long before we had met. While in Las Vegas, I filmed Esther and Honey individually and with their parents, asking more questions about how their parents' experience had affected them years later. It was during that filming that Mr. Forberg told his wife Sima that he "LOVED HER" - something that he had not said in years.

Confident that I had enough footage to put together a short film, I drove home that next day - Wednesday, 12th March 2008. Exactly 168 hours later (one week), I had completed my film and entered it in the 168 Hour Film Festival. All films needed to be submitted by 9:00pm that night or would be disqualified from the competition. A technical snafu almost kept my film from entering the competition. I remember running through the parking lot, where the films were to be turned in and screaming at the top of my lungs, "Does anybody know how to export to tape!!!" A passerby said to just turn in your hard drive (where the film was stored). That was a god-send, because the previous year, the film competition only accepted tapes for the competition.

The entire journey, from meeting the Forbergs to making the film, was all a GOD-THING and all I did was capture what He put in front of me. Two weeks later, at the Alex Theatre in Glendale, California, the movie won 2008 BEST DOCUMENTARY for the 168 Festival. Never in my wildest dreams would I have believed a story like this would unfold. One thing for sure is that, it was all *besheret* which means "inevitable" or "preordained".

In May 2010, Mr. and Mrs. Forberg, along with the rest of the Forberg family, took me to Israel to say "thank you" for all that I had done for them and to allow me to see, FIRST-HAND, the place of Jesus' birth. I had the chance to not only see Israel, but to witness Mr. Forberg with his family in the Holiest of places, the Western Wall, the *Kotel*, in the Old City of Jerusalem. It has figured prominently in the Jewish consciousness for centuries. Generations dreamed of appearing before the old stone wall, even just once, and I had been given the chance to do it with Mr. Forberg and the family.

I am eternally grateful to the entire Forberg family for their love, their support and guidance along this journey which we call "life". Mr. Forberg will be missed by so many and, for sure, he has left an

empty place in my heart today. I love you Mr. Forberg. His story of survival is touching and inspiring. I thank God that we met.

This film was shot on location in Miami Beach Florida, Las Vegas Nevada and the Dominican Republic and was created in less than two weeks.