

SHARING OUR STORIES: HERBERT FRIEDMAN

A series of poems to share the experiences of Holocaust survivor Herbert Friedman
Thank you to Ron Friedman for sharing his father's story!

BY LAUREN SUN

Hate is like mold, dark and wicked
It is the clouds covering the sun
Their words taunt me over and over
But from then, you cannot run
In their eyes, they see something "other"
But I'm just a boy, I am me
The first they see is a Jew
It is the only thing they will ever see

Herbert had a happy childhood in Vienna. He often enjoyed swimming in the Danube and watching movies from the side door of the theater, around the time when motion-pictures first started. However, anti-semitism still affected him, and he was called derogatory names; even getting into fights sometimes. He was often reminded of the fact that he was not just a boy like any other, he was Jewish - and this changed the world he lived in.

Watching from my window
The shatter of glass
The flames, the pain, the fear
Wishing it to pass
I knew from this night on
It would never be the same
I knew from this night on
The hate was far too great to tame

Herbert was only 14 when he lived through the Kristallnacht, also known as the "Night Of Broken Glass." As he watched buildings being destroyed and people being arrested, Herbert knew there was no life for him in Vienna, and resolved to leave. A month after the Kristallnacht, he did just that.

All that is certain is the present
But the train offers a dream
600 others with me
Yet I am alone, so it seems
Fourteen going on forty
Forced to grow too fast
Serious, focused, determined
I was shaped by my past

In October 1937, at age 12, he helped to save a woman drowning in the Danube. His picture was put in the paper, and it gained the attention of the Chief Rabbi, who was familiar with an organizer of the kindertransport - a rescue effort for Jewish children. This earned Herbert a spot on the train along with 600 other children, and he ended up being the first of his family to escape, leaving his parents and two siblings. Still only 14, he was forced to grow up far too young, and became a serious, focused person.

Loss casts a shadow
A reminder of times gone by
The people, the land, the home
Sometimes you wonder why
Why are we all together now?
When so much has been lost
The thought will always linger
Together, but at what cost?

A few months after he left, his father and brother got out on a vessel through Paris. After that, his mother and sister escaped, also through Paris. Herbert stayed in an orphanage in England after leaving the kindertransport. It was a miracle for him and his family to be together again, but many close friends and family had passed, and this cast a shadow over their new life. After they immigrated to the U.S., Herbert still longed for Vienna and missed his life there.

Humans are capable
Of both hate and love
Evil and goodness within
The raven and the dove
Now we hear their stories
And continue to pass them on
To seek a hopeful future
For the rise of a new dawn

From a young age, Ron Friedman learned about his father's life. Ron often visited his parents and immersed himself in Vienna culture. Herbert taught his son to work hard, and always be grateful. "They can take away your possessions, your home, but they can't take away what's in your head," Herbert told Ron. He sadly passed away on October 1, 2020, and Ron continues to share his story. "It could have been a very different story. The Jews just wanted peace, and were contributors to society, but Hitler just threw that all out the window."

"From the Holocaust we learned how evil, we as humans, can be. Humans have two sides - good and bad. We're capable of goodness and evil, all of us."

-Ron Friedman