

Holocaust Education Trust

Sir David Suchet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmgGHMyZPhY>

THE TESTIMONY OF LILY EBERT BEM

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=muTyt8Vli9c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hm-4K76rNcg>

Further Reading

As well as the links above, the following are recommended:

- **The Book Thief**, by Markus Zusak A 9 year old girl in WW2 Germany steals books to defy the Nazi regime while her foster family hides a Jew in their basement.
- **The Diary of a Young Girl**, by Anne Frank Beginning on her thirteenth birthday, Anne's diary traces her experiences of persecution and hiding from the Nazis in WW2.
- **Schindler's Ark**, by Thomas Kineally Historical fiction based on the true story of businessman Oskar Schindler's efforts to save the lives of over a thousand Jews in Nazi occupied Poland.
- **Night**, by Elie Wiesel An account of the author and his father's experiences in Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps.

- **Var Hong Ashe**, *From Phnom Penh to Paradise: Escape from Cambodia* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1988)
- **Otto Rosenberg**, *A Gypsy in Auschwitz: How I Survived the Horrors of the 'Forgotten Holocaust'*, with Ulrich Enzenberger, trans. by Maisie Musgrave (Octopus Publishing Group, 2022)

Eroding freedom

Freedom is fragile and it cannot be taken for granted. Here are some examples of ways in which the freedoms of people targeted during genocide are restricted, showing how fragile freedom is and how we must not be complacent about it.

Freedom of religion and freedom to self-identify



Jewish shops and businesses were destroyed during The Night of Broken Glass in 1938

© Bettmann / Getty

In 1933 the Nazis came to power in Germany, and life became increasingly difficult for German Jews. Anti-Jewish legislation was passed, which denied Jews many freedoms and restricted their rights, starting with removing them from certain professions and schools and universities. The Nuremberg Laws in 1935 restricted who Jews could marry, and went further than that: they defined anyone who had three or four Jewish grandparents as a Jew, regardless of whether or not that person saw themselves as Jewish. Thus the Nuremberg laws took away people's freedom of religion and freedom to self-identify. On 9 November 1938, Jewish shops and businesses in Nazi territories were attacked and destroyed. The night became known as The Night of Broken Glass. Jewish people were banned from cinemas, theatres and sports facilities.

As the German army swept through and started occupying European countries, Jewish people in those countries often had many of their freedoms taken away: they were forced into ghettos, living in cramped conditions and often doing hard labour for the Nazis or for German industries; they were deported to concentration or death camps. Being imprisoned or enslaved is the very antithesis of freedom. And this was simply because they were Jewish.

After the arrival of the Germans in the Netherlands, [Anne Frank](#) wrote in her diary: *That is when the trouble started for the Jews. Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees: Jews were required to wear a yellow star; Jews were required to turn in their bicycles; Jews were forbidden to use trams; Jews were forbidden to ride in cars, even their own; Jews were required to do their shopping between 3.00 and 5.00p.m.; Jews were required to frequent only Jewish-owned barbershops and beauty salons; Jews were forbidden to be out on the streets between 8.00 p.m. and 6.00 a.m.; Jews were forbidden to go to theatres, cinemas or any other forms of entertainments; Jews were forbidden to use swimming pools, tennis courts, hockey fields or any other athletic fields; Jews were forbidden to go rowing; Jews were forbidden to take part in any athletic activity in public; Jews were forbidden to sit in their gardens or those of their friends after 8.00 p.m.; Jews were forbidden to visit Christians in their homes; Jews were required to attend Jewish schools, etc. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that, but life went on.*

Anne and her family went into hiding, but they were betrayed and Anne died in Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, just three months short of her 16th birthday.

Freedom of reproduction

As part of the T4 euthanasia programme the Nazis sterilised hundreds of thousands of people because they were disabled or perceived to be disabled, physically or mentally. Franziska Mikus had her freedom of reproduction taken away by the Nazis, forcibly sterilised not once but twice, simply because she was deaf.

With a heavy heart I [had] to be sterilised a second time. This was the cruellest thing I ever had to endure. I will never be able to forget that.

Read Franziska's full life story at hmd.org.uk/franziska.

Freedom of movement

In the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, Eric Murangwa Eugène MBE's freedom of movement was shattered after the plane carrying the President of Rwanda was shot down on 6 April 1994. Radio broadcasts demanded people stay in their homes while soldiers crashed down their front doors to find those they deemed 'responsible'. Demanding people to stay home enabled perpetrators to find their target groups.

Read Eric's full life story at hmd.org.uk/eric.

In 1992, Kemal Pervanić was one of many Bosnian Muslim men incarcerated in the notorious Omarska Concentration Camp. One of his former schoolteachers became his

camp guard. Kemal's freedoms were lost: every aspect of his life was controlled, living conditions were appalling and he suffered beatings and deprivations.

You can read more about his life at hmd.org.uk/kemal.

Risking freedom



Vali Rácz, who risked her life to save Jews during the Holocaust © Monica Porter

It isn't only those directly targeted for persecution whose freedoms are affected by perpetrator regimes. Vali Rácz risked her freedom and her life to save Jews in Hungary during the Second World War. Despite knowing she would likely be murdered if caught, she built a false partition into a large wardrobe to hide people. She was arrested several times but with no proof that she was hiding Jews, was released.

Listen to a podcast with Monica Porter, Vali Rácz's daughter, at hmd.org.uk/vali.

Despite the horrific scenes taking place across Rwanda there were also acts of great bravery. Sula Karuhimbi was an elderly woman who lived alone on a small farm and had knowledge of natural medicines. When the genocide began she hid more than 20 Tutsis in her animal shed and fed them from her small stock of vegetables. When attackers came to her farm she used her reputation as a 'witch' to frighten them off and protect the people hiding, risking her freedom as she did so.

Five students from Munich University and one of their professors challenged the Nazi regime by forming the White Rose group. They asked German people to react to the

violence and oppression which were all around them by standing up and fighting for freedom.

Although they were successful in spreading their messages, the members of the White Rose group were all beheaded by the Nazis, who wanted to discourage anyone else from fighting for freedom.

Read more about the White Rose group at hmd.org.uk/whiterose.

Liberated but not completely free

It is a misconception that liberation from the perpetrator regime means the end of suffering and the start of a free life. Whilst allied liberators freed Holocaust survivors from the physical imprisonment of concentration camps, and dreadful conditions, the prisoners then found themselves alone, often unable to return home, and having to move to a new country, learn a new language and rebuild their lives from scratch. They had to rebuild new lives with the painful absence of family members and friends. Many have described the years post-liberation as ‘being physically free, but not mentally free.’

Holocaust survivor Esther Brunstein said:

The first few days after liberation were joyous and yet sad, confusing and bewildering. I did not know how to cope with freedom after years of painful imprisonment.

Read Esther’s full life story at hmd.org.uk/esther.



Otto Rosenberg (front) with his mother and siblings,

many of whom were
murdered by the Nazis

As Otto Rosenberg who was persecuted by the Nazis because he was Sinti noted, it was hard to enjoy freedom knowing his family members had been murdered:

They say: "you have your freedom now, be happy". There was no way I could be all joyful, because I missed my brothers and sisters, always, to this very day. When the holidays came and people celebrated, or the families sat together, that was when this inner thing, this nervous strain came. That was very hard.

Read his full life story at hmd.org.uk/otto.

Indeed, gay men who were imprisoned by the Nazis did not find the freedom they had hoped for as they were still regarded as criminals after liberation and it wasn't until 1968 when they would be safe from prosecution.

Read more about the persecution of gay people and what happened afterwards at hmd.org.uk/gay-people.

Just because one person was liberated, it did not mean that the rest of their family were safe. As Sabit Jakupović, a survivor of the genocide in Bosnia explains:

And that was one of the very hard moments because I felt safe, and I felt lost. I was in a completely different country, different weather, different language. Then I remembered that I left my brothers behind. Those emotions were tearing me apart, you can't enjoy the freedom and liberty because the war is still happening.

Read Sabit's full life story at hmd.org.uk/sabit.

Enjoying freedom

Some survivors were able to enjoy their freedom. After surviving ghettos, concentration camps and a death march, Holocaust survivor Alec Ward came to England. He said:

We lived in Southampton for a while where I was intoxicated with the freedom in England. I could walk freely wherever I wanted, I could ride a bicycle and everyone was so extremely kind and helpful to me.

Read his full life story at hmd.org.uk/alec.

Vulnerability of freedom

For some survivors, post-genocide freedom remains always vulnerable to being snatched away. Denial and distortion follow all genocides, and are on the increase where

countries attempt to reshape their past. Holocaust distortion and antisemitism (anti-Jewish hatred) have been present since the end of World War Two and remain prevalent today.

Leon Greenman built a life in the UK after surviving Auschwitz, only to suffer an antisemitic attack on his home in London in the 1990s.

Antoinette Mutabazi did not feel free to return to her home village after the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda when she heard that a perpetrator had been released from prison and had returned to the village.

Freedom today

Today many people in western democracies take freedoms for granted – this HMD, we can reflect on how these freedoms need to be valued, and on how many people around the world face restrictions to their freedoms to live, worship, work and love freely.

For example, Uyghur Muslims in China are facing forced relocation to Xinjiang province, ‘re-education’ that threatens to eradicate the Uyghur culture, and other limits to free expression, free movement and freedom of worship.

Hundreds of thousands of Rohingya Muslims are living in refugee camps in Bangladesh, having escaped religious persecution in Myanmar.

Conflict is still ongoing in the Darfur region of Sudan. Survivors of the genocide, now safe in the UK, are terrified for the safety of their family members still in Darfur, and scared to speak out publicly in the UK lest their family members’ lives are threatened.

Holocaust Memorial Day 2024

Anne Frank’s comment, quoted above, concludes ‘You couldn’t do this and you couldn’t do that, but life went on’. But of course, for Anne, and millions of others, life did not go on – they were deliberately murdered. Building upon the multiple restrictions on their freedoms, their freedom of life was destroyed.

On HMD 2024, we can all reflect on how freedom is fragile and vulnerable to abuse. As we come together in communities around the UK, let’s pledge not to take our freedoms for granted, and consider what we can do to strengthen freedoms around the world.