

Latvian Holocaust Documentary, Forgotten Transports

Sep 13, 2010 Jennifer Ciotta

Learn about a new historical documentary that focuses on the Riga ghetto of Latvia during the Holocaust and World War II.

Latvia, a small country located on the Baltic Sea, is not known for the Holocaust. As I came to learn by living in the Baltic states, Latvia had concentration camps on its land. Much blood was shed as Holocaust victims died and many others were tortured. Unfortunately, Latvia knows the Holocaust all too well.

A Film Dedicated to Holocaust Victims

Lukas Pribyl, historian of Jewish and World War II history, knew that the world saw the Holocaust through Auschwitz, Dachau and Bergen-Belsen. These camps had infamous names that served as plots for books, television and films such as Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island*. But what about concentration camps such as Salaspils and Vaivara? Where were they located and who died there?

Pribyl decided to tell the story of the forgotten concentration camps through the medium of film. In a documentary series of four 90-minute films, Pribyl tells the stories of Jewish Holocaust victims in the unknown camps and ghettos of Latvia, Belarus, Estonia and eastern Poland. Each film depicts a deportation story and how the victims survived.

He explores each nation's Holocaust stories through 260 hours of interviews, which were collected on three continents and in 20 countries. A massive undertaking, Pribyl researched for eight years to compile all the information needed for these films. The experience was personal to him, since his family was devastated by the Holocaust.

World War II History in Riga Latvia

In Pribyl's film entitled *Forgotten Transports: To Latvia*, in January 1942, unsuspecting Czech Jews were deported to the Riga ghetto, located in the capital of Latvia. They awaited their fate, to be killed or deported to a concentration camp. A barbed wire fence surrounded the ghetto, locking the Jews inside.

These Holocaust survivors tell their stories of living in the Riga ghetto in Pribyl's film. The stories focus on fear, a love of life and a sheer will to live. Bodies dangle from the gallows as children pass by on their way to school. Boys play football on the same square where executions take place. It is a haunting and chilling tale of the Holocaust.

Some of the unlucky Jews were deported again, this time to a concentration camp in Salaspils, only a short train ride away from Riga. I took that train ride several times myself. I visited the former concentration camp site where a memorial now stands in its place.

I walked on a path through the forest to an abandoned field as snow fell all around me. A gigantic stone man lay

on the ground, raising his body in defiance. Two stone men punched their fists in the gray sky. Their chiseled features looked gaunt and starved.

I stood out there in that forest for a long time. My extremities numbed, but I still had to remove my glove to touch the stone skirt of a woman shielding her children from the monsters. She would not let them bake her children. They would survive.

As I left the forest, I walked in silence back to the train station. I suppose this is the story Lukas Pribyl captures in his new documentary about Latvia. The struggle, the horror, and most of all, the survival. The beautiful survival of history gone wrong.

Check out the Eastern European History blog on Suite 101.

Source:

Forgotten Transports by Lukas Pribyl -- viewed September 12, 2010

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