



‘We carry on telling our stories because we were eye-witnesses. The most important thing is to tell people so this can never happen again’ – Ibi Ginsburg, Holocaust survivor.

On Holocaust Memorial Day 2010, hundreds of thousands of people across the UK came together and pledged to become part of The Legacy of Hope. Holocaust Memorial Day 2011 – 27 January - offers us a new opportunity to make this promise a meaningful part of our future.

The Holocaust was a tragically defining episode of the 20th century. Millions of lives were destroyed or changed beyond recognition under the Nazi regime of hatred. Families, communities and towns were totally wiped out. When the world learned, for the first time the scale of the destruction wrought between 1933 and 1945 it vowed ‘Never Again’. The subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur have shown that there is still much to be done to make this undertaking real.

It’s easy to talk about the numbers murdered and persecuted during the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. It’s less easy to truly appreciate what these figures mean. The 11 million people murdered by the Nazis were not a statistic. They were individuals. Somebody’s friend. A mother. A father. A child. A colleague. A neighbour.

It is a sad fact that we will never know all of the names of those whose lives were wasted. We can never know all of their stories. But today, we can all listen and we can learn. We can find out what life was like for people such as Janina Fischler-Martinho who was forced to live in the Krakow Ghetto. We can read about the experience of Darfuri survivor Halima Bashir. We can explore the inconceivable decision made by Trude Silman’s parents to send their daughter away to the UK for safety and we can ask how that changed her life and what happened to her after her arrival. We can commit to learn more about all of the victims of Nazi persecution, including the fate of Europe’s Roma and Sinti or those who were persecuted based on their sexual orientation, disability, political affiliation, religious belief or skin colour. Holocaust Memorial Day 2011 provides us with the opportunity to do this. It also encourages us to look for the **Untold Stories** in our own communities. Dr Ralph Kohn is a case in point. Granted refugee status in the UK as part of the Academic Refugee programme in 1933, he became a world class pharmacologist. Today, in many communities we live alongside refugees from across the world. On HMD 2011 let us ask ourselves if we know their stories.

Under regimes of hatred it is not only individuals who are targeted for destruction but entire communities. The village of Trochenbrod, then in Poland, was completely devastated by the Nazis in 1942 and today only the name remains. This story is not unique – countless other towns and villages were destroyed. The Valley of the Communities at Yad Vashem brings together the stories of those lost communities as a permanent monument.

There are some stories from the Holocaust which we know. We are familiar with Oskar Schindler, who saved 1200 Jews from death and concentration camps because his remarkable story was told in the 1993 film Schindler’s List. For every story we know in this way, there are many millions more which we do not. Now is the time for these **Untold Stories** to be heard. Using the written or oral testimonies of survivors and the stories of their lives we open ourselves up to hearing the **Untold Stories** the families, communities and friends who were lost. We can use the story of the partisans, such as Jack Kagan as our inspiration to stand up for fairness and equality today.

Each of us re-tell stories in hundreds of ways every day and there are many **Untold Stories** among people we live and work with – in our classrooms, offices and community centres. We retell stories when we tell our friends about the town in which we grew up or when we continue to follow the advice of older generations within our families in the ways we behave and conduct ourselves. We share interesting news stories on our blogs and social networks. On HMD 2011 there are endless stories we can tell. They are not fiction. The accounts of those who perished and those who survived can and should have an impact on our behaviour today. Some stories are not easy to hear. They can speak of danger, pain and suffering. We must not shy away from these stories – it is vital to recognise the consequences of exclusion and persecution in order for us to learn the lessons of the past. However, even in seemingly hopeless situations, we can also hear stories of hope – how survivors rebuilt their lives or the stories of vibrant communities which existed before they were destroyed, or the selfless acts of rescuers and ordinary people.

It is not enough just to tell a story. We must listen to them too. In our communities there may be stories we do not hear. Do we hear the voices of the marginalised? Do we know who lives in our community and do we choose to listen to their stories? Startling facts can come out of hearing these stories. In the UK, infant mortality rate in the Gypsy and Traveller communities is three times higher than in the rest of the population¹. 65% of gay, lesbian and bisexual students experience bullying at school². Listening to these stories can bring about a change for the benefit of us all.

Raphael Lemkin dedicated his life to telling a story. This Polish Jew brought the story of the persecution of Armenians in 1915 to the attention of the world. His work culminated in the establishment of the term 'genocide' and provided the basis for the UN Convention on genocide. Because the stories of the fate of the Armenians were not heard, the Nazis were confident that their actions against those they perceived as 'different' would not be challenged. Lemkin's work underlines the importance of listening, telling and recording our stories for posterity.

By hearing stories we have not heard before we can understand the need to live in a society which values difference and does not discriminate against anyone based on their race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability or gender. These stories can assist us in celebrating the society we live in today.

On Holocaust Memorial Day 2011 we can, in numerous ways make **Untold Stories** part of our safer future. We can share **Untold Stories** with our friends, families and colleagues. We can make the lessons of these stories an inspiration for our behaviour. Where stories are missing, we can remember that millions of lives have been wasted and we can pay respect to those individuals. Moreover, we can share stories of the way in which we live today.

We live in an age where it is easy to share **Untold Stories**. We can blog, we can record our stories and we can create artwork and media which is accessible to large audiences. Our stories can be shared instantly. We all have the power to play a part in the lives and words that are remembered. It is our role to ensure that the stories of the past do not get lost. We can join together to tell stories that enable us to learn *from* history, from the real stories of those who are no longer with us in order to create a safer, better future.

'There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.' – Maya Angelou

¹ Source: Inequalities experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller Communities: A Review – Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009

² School Report -The experiences of young gay people in Britain's schools – Stonewall, 2007