

BYkids

TRANSCRIPT:

L'CHAIM

a BYkids film
THEIR WORLD THEIR FILMS

Semon [Zee Mon] Shabaev: The first thing anyone ever asks me when they find out I'm Jewish is, "You're Jewish? And you live in Berlin, Germany of all places?"

[Setting] Rykestrasse Synagogue, Berlin, Germany

All young Jews in Germany have a really big task because we are the people who must tell other people from other countries why we are living in Germany, why we are living in this place where we were killed by the Germans.

It has always been a dream of mine to show Jewish life in modern day Berlin. Navigating the past, while living in the present.

My name is Semon Shabaev. I'm 19 years old. And I'm a young Jew from Berlin, Germany.

[Title] L'CHAIM Young, Jewish, German

From an early age on I was taught to respect my elders and to love and honor my Jewish faith. Because of our Jewish faith, my father decided to leave to former Soviet Union and had to choose between the U.S., Israel, and Germany.

He decided to go to Germany even despite Germany's dark past. He believed in the country and he also believed in the opportunity he would get to start a new life here in Germany.

Family is the most important thing to me. They help me to become this person who I am today. My mother is not only my mother. She's my best friend too.

Semon's Mother: To my son, Semon, his Jewish religion is very important. In the 1990s Jews were offered the opportunity to come back to Germany.

Semon: Anna is my sister and she's almost like a twin. She's only one year younger. She's my better half. I love her so much. She's also very creative. Plays the piano and composes her own pieces.

Anna: Being a Jew in Germany offers you a lot of opportunities. I can live my Jewish, personality and I can show that I'm Jewish. I'm proud to be Jewish. It's important to keep the Jewish roots because we are a nation and have been going through so much.

Despite this hard history and this hard time we've been going through, we've built up a big

community.

Semon: I think life gives you two families: One you are born with and the other one, and the other one you choose by yourself.

Jakob is my best friend. Anna, he and I are kind of inseparable.

Semon: Every time, if you look at the picture, I'm always smiling but my sister is not. I'm smiling and you're not.

Anna: But here I'm smiling. Yeah, yeah because I'm not here. (laughter)

Semon: I wanted to include Jakob and Anna in this film because together we don't only represent a younger generation of German Jews, but each of us brings different aspects to the heart of this film in a way that no one person can because the subject really is bigger than all of us.

I was always very shy and introverted. I started building walls around me to protect myself. But, when I was 11 years old, I joined a group of Jewish youngsters who invited me to visit a Jewish youth center.

Being with other Jewish kids every Sunday helped me feel more self-confident. So today, I wanted to introduce our Jewish youth center called Olam where we get together every Sunday.

Olam has played an important part in my life.

Semon: Why is Olam important?

Emanuel Adiniaev, youth coordinator, Jewish Community of Berlin: We give possibilities to the kids here that they don't get every day because not every Jewish child is in a Jewish elementary school or a Jewish high school and we give them the possibility every Sunday to learn something about Judaism, to meet new Jewish friends, to learn something about history, about Jewish traditions.

I personally find the youth center is one of the most important departments of the Jewish community in Berlin. The kids that come here become later members of the boards of the Jewish community, principals and teachers in the schools and some of them also go to the Israeli army. It all begins in Olam.

Semon: Today I work as a Madrich or Youth Guide. I see myself not so much as a teacher, but as a big brother and I consider it my duty to guide these young people and to pass on our traditions to the next generation.

Semon: What do we celebrate next week? Yeah?

Student in the group: I will celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut. It's the Independence of Israel.

Semon: Right. And, how do we celebrate this?

Student in the group: I will go to the synagogue and, um, we celebrate like a birthday of Israel.

Semon: Right. Yom Ha'atzmaut is the birthday of Israel. Okay guys thank you for your attention and we go eat something, right? Right.

"Eins, zwei, drei" Baruch ata Adonai

Semon: Today, we interview Rabbi Joshua Spinner. He's been living and working in Berlin for almost 20 years and really knows all about the Jewish community here. I have a lot of questions for him.

[6:03]

Joshua Spinner, Executive Vice President and CEO, The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation: There's no question that there's been a resurgence or even a renaissance of Jewish life in Berlin and there were a number of things that Germany undertook and one of those things was a commitment to rebuilding Jewish life.

It seemed to me that Germany has done a significant job in trying to come to terms with the past and in trying to ensure that it, not its Jews, but it is fundamentally different.

So if you ask me if I'm concerned about antisemitism in Germany today in a way that affects my life now? No. In a way that may affect my life in ten or twenty years and put a question mark over this entire project then? Yes. Definitely.

The people who feel today German and Jewish, are not making a claim that they are German Jews. They are making a claim that they are German and Jewish and these things are not contradictory or they're comfortable with both. So it's kind of a new thing.

Of course living in Germany, things, tragedies that happened more recently, but also the important and exciting and positive things happened in Germany and Europe over the thousand year history of Jewish people. Unbelievable intellectual history. The amount of scholarship of the Torah that took place in this country is astounding. From the 11th century straight through till shortly before the Second World War and the Holocaust.

Right from a German perspective perhaps what's extraordinary is that some level of forgiveness has been possible and some level of change has been possible and that there is a different country today then the one that existed before. And that enough Jews feel comfortable living here certainly relative to other places in the world that they do live here. That's one piece of the story.

From the Jewish perspective, what's extraordinary, what is almost a mirror image of that is the incredible resilience of our people. The importance of being here-not for German society - but for the rest of Jewish society is such a clear and compelling sense of mission and purpose that it outweighs any of the insecurities.

When the room here and the children here look and act and sing and engage and observe just like Jewish kids in London, just like Jewish kids in New York, that matters. That's important.

(Singing in Hebrew)

Semon: In Berlin, you can never escape the past. Past and present always live side by side. Here was once the Berlin Wall. Right there.

Jakob: You can see it actually on this line. You see?

Semon: Yeah.

[Setting] Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

Semon: For me, it's important to do a tour of historical Jewish sights. The sights are a good way for people to honor the fate of millions of Jewish people who died during World War II. And there's no better person to take us around than Jakob. Jakob is like an expert in all things German and Jewish.

To me, it's important to know the history of our country. We all know about the past, especially National Socialism because it's so important to remember this time. There are monuments everywhere.

Anna: Standing here, it's just a horrible feeling. When I think about it, the stones symbolize the dead people, I get goosebumps.

Jakob: When you walk through Berlin and you see this memorial, when you look up you see the American flag on its embassy, and when you look straight you see the German flag on the Reichstag. you can actually see the whole of German history of the past 80 years.

This is a very emotional place. It's in the center of Berlin, it's in the heart of Germany, it's in the heart of Europe and it's reminding us always that worst genocide in human history happened in the last century here in Germany.

Semon: Between 1941 and 1945, Track 17, which was once a regular train track, and part of the Grunewald station of Berlin became the train track from which Jews were deported to concentration camps in Eastern Europe, including Auschwitz.

In October 1991, this track was turned into a memorial site. The steps up to the tracks are the very same steps taken by those who were brought here to be deported.

Jakob: We are here in Grunewald in a borough where there's a lot of Jewish people where there used to be even more Jewish people. They were literally taken from their homes, from their home train station to the last days of their lives.

Semon: The ground you walk on, is the ground the people walked on. It's an eerie feeling.

Jakob: The people here used to also come to this normal place where they came to catch a train, to take a trip somewhere, to do something completely daily. From one to day to another, it changed. The Holocaust.

Today, this is the train station as it used to be. Except for this platform. It's part of German remembrance culture. We shall never forget what happened in the past.

It's undoubtedly true that there is a rise of antisemitism, uh, in the present day. Thank God I don't experience it personally but, it's still an important matter we have to face.

Semon: We must understand what antisemitism is.

Anna: I think the people always need a victim group or a group who are weaker than themselves--

Jakob: A minority.

Anna: Yeah. It's always a minority.

Semon: I think people think about Jewish people "Hm. They're so rich". The people think the world is ours.

Jakob: So you can see what all this antisemitism can lead to actually. We're sitting on a place like this, where the antisemitic people got to power and started, not only to discriminate, but to kill.

Semon: I was born in this country as a German and a Jew. It is important to me to show how this country is dealing with its dark past and not just with silent memorials but actively remembering the dead.

It is Holocaust Remembrance Day and it's a gray, dark January day. The concentration camp is exactly 60 minutes from my home. 80 years ago, a few miles away from Berlin, people were murdered in the worst possible ways because of their beliefs.

Looking at this place and thinking about what happened, it makes me doubt humanity.

Until 1945 the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp was the model camp for all other camps. It was built at a time when the world press was distracted watching the 1936 Olympics which took place only a few miles away from Berlin.

Every year Germany marks International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This year, more than 80 years after the November pogrom, also known as the Kristallnacht or Crystal Night, Jews that were taken from their homes in Berlin on that night are being remembered in a special ceremony.

Britta Stark, President, Brandenburg State Parliament: On November 9, 1938, synagogues were burning in Berlin. The November pogrom was the beginning of the murder of European Jews. German culture did not prevent this from happening. It happened and thus it can happen again.

Our time calls for finding a new togetherness, a life together without hate, without racism, discrimination and exclusion.

[The reading of names of the dead.]

Semon: As Germans, we learn about the Holocaust from an early age on. It becomes part of our identity, and it always ends in the same motto: Never again and never forget.

Young Woman at the event: The significance of this day, to me personally, is that we are from Germany and this is Germany's history. We have to remember this history because we are the next generation and we are the future.

Semon: When you walk the sidewalks of Berlin, you will notice special golden stones on the ground. These are so called "Stolpersteine." The name literally means: stumbling stones.

These golden stones are placed into the sidewalks in front of the very buildings that Jews were deported from and bearing their names.

I think having memorials is one thing, but putting the names to the endless number of deported and murdered Jews is another. They deserved to be remembered by name and on a daily basis.

This project was conceived by German artist Gunter Demnig.

Gunter Demnig, German artist: There are many center monuments, you know, in the middle of Berlin, big monuments but it's anonymous, but the names and it happened here. Not anywhere. So, if you see the stone and you want to read, you have to bow.

Well, I think it's very important for the relatives because well now there's a place they can remember because many of them, most of them, don't have a grave don't have a gravestone.

Semon: While most stones commemorate names of Jews who died in concentration camps, today's ceremony is dedicated to Jews who survived.

For this ceremony, Howard Schattner, the son of Holocaust survivor Meschulim Schattner, sent words to be read for the ceremony.

Howard Schattner: Here are his own words: I would like to thank you all for coming on a quiet, cold, February morning to participate in this very special event the installation of Stolpersteine for the Holocaust survivors, my father, Meschulim Schattner, and his two brothers, Berl and Jakob.

It was 6 o'clock in the morning on October 28, 1938 when a loud knocking sounded at the family's front door.

At the door, it was the police with an order to arrest the three brothers. They were taken, placed on a train, transported to the Polish border and expelled from the country. For the next nine years, they lived as refugees. Finally, they emigrated to New York City where they began their new life.

Semon: Many neighbors also attended. Two current residents, a Jewish couple from Russia, who lives in the very same building Max Schattner used to live in, comes to pay their respects to the newly laid stumbling stones.

Jewish Neighbor: I live in this building and these beautiful people lived in this building (before me). And now I feel such sorrow for that time.

Semon: The stumbling stones to me are yet another way to remember the past while living in the present.

I think the Stolpersteine are a symbol for us because 6 million Jewish people, it's a very big number and one name or, here, three names, see, that's another feeling.

For some people, it's unbelievable to see police officers standing outside Jewish buildings. But for me, it's a normal thing. The Berlin city government offers police protection to all Jewish institutions around Berlin.

[Setting] New Synagogue, Berlin, Germany

Recently, antisemitism has once again become a more prominent issue both in Germany and world-wide. It is important for me to talk about antisemitism.

Today, we are at the Central Council for Jews in Germany. The Central Council recently implemented a new program called: Likrat. It is a program designed to educate young Jews between the ages of 15 and 19 about Judaism

Daniel Botmann, Managing Director Central Council of Jews in Germany: With Likrat we have succeeded in developing a program that aims to counteract antisemitism.

Focusing on the individual and presenting the Likratino or Likratina as an authentic person who lives their Judaism in their own individual way. And showing that this person is someone just like you and me.

Semon: With this program, we visit seminars where we learn how to convey the principles of Judaism to people who are not Jewish. Schools can request to have the Likratinos come to their school to talk about Judaism.

That's why I signed up for the class to become a so-called Likratino. Our goal is to build bridges with the non-Jewish population and to address any prejudice or outright antisemitism.

I feel it's important to show that we are all just normal people just with different faiths and that that is okay. Most of my generation doesn't blame young Germans for what their ancestors did.

Daniel Botmann: In 2021, we will be celebrating 1,700 years of Jewish life in Germany. Today we are in a situation where we have a strong Jewish community, where we have a self-confident Jewish youth. A youth that on the one hand honors its Jewish faith and its Jewish roots and is conscious of it. And on the other hand, has both legs firmly rooted in their country, Germany.

This is very special. Something that for some of the Likratinos' grandparents would almost be incomprehensible. How one can profess oneself to this country. So, a development where among the Jewish community as well, we feel that, "Yes, we are at home here."

We are ready to help build up this whole German house and be part of it and to contribute our part to it.

Semon: One of the highlights for our youth center is to prepare for a singing and dancing contest called Jewrovision.

I have been taking part in Jewrovision ever since I was 12 years old. This year, I'm not performing with the Jewrovision. But I'm here to make a behind the scenes video journal.

Jakob: Jewrovision is the biggest competition hosted by the Central Council of the Jews in Germany for Jewish kids all over Germany.

Semon: Every year, we get to the event on Friday afternoon and celebrate Shabbat together. Everybody loves Jewrovision, because you connect with young Jews from all over Germany.

Some Jewish people of my generation often feel we need to remember. Yes, but is it not also time to move on? Live in the present and look to the future.

Anna: What we achieved, despite our past, the Jewish life exists in Germany and that's the important thing.

Jakob: We have to get out from this victim role. Of course history has dark parts but, being Jewish here and showing that we are still here we will not leave this country because it's our's too as well as yours is an act of power.

Singers: What doesn't kill you makes you stronger. We are getting stronger and stronger. Live life! And I love this life. In the morning, at noon, at night– bigger, louder!

Semon: When somebody asks me "Do you feel more Jew? Or do you feel more German?" I can't answer this question because I'm both and I love to be both.

This year was more exciting than ever. After preparing for Jewrovision all year, we ended up winning first prize. It was an absolutely amazing feeling.

But, the most amazing thing was, despite the competition, there was an incredible sense of togetherness. Among all us young Jews in Germany. To me, that's the biggest prize of all.

Dedicated to the six million murdered Jews who lost their lives to senseless hate and antisemitism.

[24:43] **CREDITS ROLL**