

Throughout middle and high school, I actively participated in National History Day. Rather than a competitive spirit or desire to share narratives often lost within the labyrinth of history, I was afforded the opportunity to explore intense topics at a young age. With such research came interviews, scouring the internet for people who could provide insight into times we had never known. I'm endlessly and affectionately grateful to every professor, historian, and government official internationally who made time to answer questions by two middle schoolers from Madison, WI.

Yet, it was the survivors, the individuals, who made the research process tangible. I have been afforded the opportunity to meet multiple survivors of the Holocaust, people so deeply impacted by horrors that occurred not even 100 years ago. In these moments history blends with my reality. No longer do the confines of time separate the darkest of times from my own life. I sit across the table, staring into the eyes of someone who has seen the worst of humanity.

Renata Laxova was a woman I had met on a few occasions through the years. A survivor of the Holocaust via the Kindertransport, I was overwhelmed by her generosity, perseverance, and appreciation for life. She sat with Lauren and I for hours, answering every question we could imagine. She offered us snacks, showed us her late husband's beautiful woodworking, and even praised us for the work we had done. It hadn't felt like work, though, merely a continuation of her story which deserves to be shared. Twelve year old me was sitting with a woman so profoundly touched by unimaginable pain, yet she had the most wonderful smile. She so warmly let us into her life. What perhaps struck me the most was that Dr. Laxova lived a mere twenty minutes from my home. As young people we are living amongst history. Maybe it's our job to seek it out.

Almost five years since I last saw Renata, I am a graduating high school senior. Renata passed away a few days ago due to a short illness at the age of 89. I finished my seventh and final National History Day project in the spring. The overwhelming sadness I feel, the loss of a remarkable individual, reminds me that there still is injustice and cruelty and pain. There is work to be done. Renata's life and the life of so many other survivors cannot be lost in that labyrinth, rather featured and remembered and honored... because that is what she deserves. Dr. Laxova was truly a woman of utmost character, devotion, and love. I pray that her long rest is a reward for the remarkable imprint she left on this world. Thank you, Renata. Rest easy.

-Siena P.