

‘The Last Folio’: Powerful photos document Slovakian Holocaust survivors

BY TOBY HERSCOVITCH
CENTRE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION AND
SCHOLARSHIP

Call it serendipity or destiny, Yuri Dojc arrived at his unique interpretation of Holocaust education, or what the Czechoslovakian-born Canadian photographer calls “cultural memory,” through a series of fortuitous turning points.

“I see them as nothing short of miraculous,” says Dojc.

Dojc will talk about his powerful photography project, “The Last Folio,” on Sunday, November 3, 7 pm, at a Holocaust Education Month event organized by the Centre for Holocaust Education and Scholarship in cooperation with the Slovak Embassy and Azrieli Foundation.

Born in Czechoslovakia after the Second World War, Dojc knew his Jewish parents had kept a step ahead of Nazi deportation by being hidden in various mountain retreats, helped by fellow teachers. But like many survivors, “my parents kept their past at bay. They had to deal with their own trauma, adapt to a new communist world and they neglected to fully teach my sister and I who we were.”

Dojc immigrated to Canada by pure chance. In August 1968, the day he was scheduled to fly home

from a London visit, the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia. An American uncle advised him to go to Canada. He landed in Toronto as a refugee, and eventually studied photography at Ryerson, which he parlayed into a successful commercial photography career.

Dojc explains that “The Last Folio” started in 1997 when, at his father’s funeral in Slovakia, he met an Auschwitz survivor who revived his interest in his heritage. The woman disclosed an eerie ‘prophesy,’ told to her by a Roma inmate at the death camp. It all came true, except for one prediction.

“I witnessed the last one,” says Dojc, who will reveal the ‘prophesy’ during his talk.

“My father’s last words were ‘Look after your mother,’ so I started going back to Slovakia more often,” says Dojc, tagging along on the Auschwitz survivor’s visits to other survivors, and photographing them.

Fate or formidable coincidence intervened again.

“As I was visiting a survivor, a neighbour knocked on the door. He told us he had the key to an old Jewish schoolhouse, a cheder empty for more than a decade, which still held books of those who were deported to concentration camps.”

What they found inside – decaying Hebrew books,



Yuri Dojc will discuss “The Last Folio,” his photos of Slovakian Holocaust survivors at Kehillat Beth Israel on November 3.

tefillin, personal notebooks and more – were all “witnesses to a once thriving culture.” Beyond the artistic images, Dojc says, “these books belonged to someone who had a family, someone who never had a funeral... They give each person a kind of existence.”

A meeting with filmmaker Katya Krausova at a 2005 reunion of Slovaks who left the country in 1968, led to the book’s production, a film and exhibits around the world.

How Dojc discovered his own grandfather’s book among the ruins is another miraculous tale.

To attend Dojc’s presentation, RSVP to HEMrsvp2019@gmail.com by October 25. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/y3j5ofs7> for more information.