

Facebook Profile For Holocaust Victim Brings History to Life

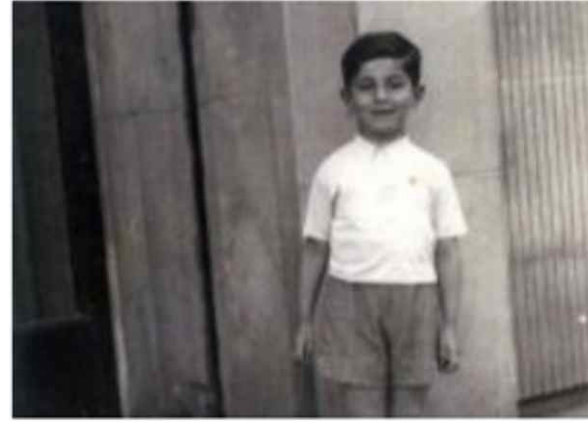


February 04, 2010 by Brenna Ehrlich

135

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Virtual memorials are nothing new — people have been paying their respects to departed loved ones on Facebook and Myspace for years. But a Facebook page set up for Henio Zytomirski, a 6-year-old Polish boy who was killed during the Holocaust, is truly revolutionizing the way we recount history and remember the dead. His profile is, in essence, a virtual museum.



Last summer, a group of people in Lublin, Poland, and Israel — including Henio's cousin Neta Zytomirski Avidar — created a Facebook profile for the boy, who was sent to the Majdanek death camp in 1942. According to the AP, the idea grew out of a group called Grodzka Gate-NN Teater, which uses the arts to remember victims of the Holocaust. Henio was chosen because there were so many photos and letters available to draw from, which makes his profile a truly rich reading experience.

The profile functions as kind of a piecemeal storybook, with Polish status updates in Henio's voice as well as photos and other updates in the third person that tell his tale. Henio's own voice is simple and touching, as you can see in the selection below. (Rough Translation: "I am seven years old. I have a mom and dad. I have a favorite place. Not everyone has a mom and dad, but everyone has their favorite place. Today I decided that I will never leave Lublin. I will stay here forever. In my favorite place. With Mom and Dad. In Lublin.")



Henio Zytomirski Mam siedem lat. Mam mamę i tatę. Mam swoje ulubione miejsce. Nie każdy ma mamę i tatę, ale każdy ma swoje ulubione miejsce. Dziś postanowiłem, że nigdy nie wyjadę z Lublina. Zostanę tu na zawsze. W moim ulubionym miejscu. Z mamą i tatą. W Lublinie.

October 11, 2009 at 4:12pm

14 people like this.



Karolina Czarska nie mam słów ...

October 11, 2009 at 4:18pm



Damien Galiński mocne zdania heniu..

October 11, 2009 at 6:11pm

According to the AP, not everyone is happy with the project — the news company cites Adam Kopciowski, a historian at Lublin's Marie Curie-Skłodowska University who specializes in Jewish studies, who thinks that writing in the dead boy's voice is ethically unsound and amounts to "abuse toward a child that has been dead for the past 70 years." Others have also raised the fact that the page — much like Doppelganger Week — violates Facebook's TOS.

Still, Henio's cousin makes very clear in a note on the profile that the young boy's voice is meant to be purely speculative, and that he is to function as a symbol:

"We try to reconstruct his life in the ghetto from survivors' testimonies, from documents, from knowing the history of Lublin during the Nazi occupation. From all of these we try to guess what might have been his testimony.

Henio is also a representing figure, a symbolic figure, an icon. His figure represents the destruction of the ancient Jewish community of Lublin.

His figure brings to Facebook the story of the Jewish community under the Nazi occupation regime and of its ruin."

And judging by his 3,000+ fans, scores of thankful wall posts and avalanche of virtual gifts, people have become enamored of the long-lost boy.



Henio Zytomirski Henio and his mum/1936



January 3 at 2:16pm · Share



Maritta Schleyer Henio looks exactly like my son. I feel very very sad.

January 3 at 4:06pm



Marge Teilhaber What a beautiful mother and son. No words.

January 3 at 5:30pm



Rachel Mikos may peace be upon their souls

January 4 at 3:16am

Aside from being a touching memorial to a tragically departed boy, Henio's profile is also a fascinating use of social media as an educational tool. Some of us have probably visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Upon entering, you receive a passport depicting someone who experienced the Holocaust, and throughout your tour through the museum, you learn his or her fate. Henio's page brings this experience to another level, allowing you to interact with the boy, and to learn about his life in a way that integrates fully into your own social media experience.

This profile only goes to show how sites like Facebook are no longer silly time wasters or places to troll for your next collegiate hookup, they provide us with news, entertainment, advertisements and, now — as more and more people are seeing it as both a news portal and source — education. I recently became a friend of Henio's, will you?