



0. Who was Jacobo Timerman? - Story Preface

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Jacobo Timerman was born in 1923, in the part of the Soviet Union called the Ukraine, in a village called Bar, where his ancestors had lived for over 500 years. His family was among the oldest and most respected citizens of the town.

The Timermans were Jewish, and were known for speaking-up for the rights of Jews in their country. Jacobo carried on his family's tradition--although his fight would be for not just the Jewish community, but for all people.

When Jacobo was five years old, his family moved to Argentina hoping they would find a safe haven and a new beginning in a new country. Jacobo and his baby brother thus grew up speaking Spanish, Russian and Yiddish.

Jacobo's family lived in the poorest section of Buenos Aires, the capital city of Argentina. They all lived in one room that only had two beds, a table, and a closet. Their kitchen was a small charcoal grill in the courtyard of the apartment building that they had to share with the rest of the people who lived there. Jacobo's mother made all his clothes, for they had no money to buy clothing.

One day Jacobo heard the other children in his neighborhood talking excitedly about what costume they would wear in the street parade during Carnival, a holiday Christian Argentines celebrate before Lent. He begged his mother to make him a clown costume but she refused, saying, "They are celebrating a Christian holiday and we are Jewish."

Jacobo didn't understand: "Mother, they will laugh at me." His mother told him that she believed that Carnival was an anti-Semitic holiday and explained that religious hatred prevailed in many countries.

"Mother," he asked, "why do they hate us?"

Although his mother felt very strongly about retaining the family's Jewish heritage, Jacobo did not believe that the country was anti-Semitic, but later came to see that there were groups of people who hated Jews living there. Jacobo's mother never learned Spanish, the language of Argentina, and always spoke to her sons in Yiddish, the traditional language of Jews in Europe.

Jacobo's father died when he was twelve, and the family moved to the Jewish Quarter of Buenos Aires. The family was even poorer than before, and they lived here in another single room.

In exchange for rent, Jacobo's mother cleaned the building and sold handmade clothing on the street to earn money for food. Jacobo's younger brother ran the stand, and Jacobo had an after-school job as a messenger for a jewelry store. On weekends, Jacobo washed and ironed clothes, and helped his mother scrub the hallways of the apartment building.

Life was very hard, but Jacobo had not known any time in his life when life wasn't hard. Therefore, he dedicated himself to helping out all he could.

Footnotes:

1) Skilling, Johanna, Interview with Javier Timerman (son of Jacobo Timerman), New York City, Nov/12/1994, Sep/12/2015, [n/a](#)

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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