

## *Stories to be Remembered*

Here I am, standing in Le Père Lachaise, a living standing amongst millions of dead. For some reason, I feel obligated to remember those who have passed away. You see memory is a weird thing. It can save the simplest and seemingly most insignificant details of your life, like the name of your first-grade teacher. However, it can make you forget the things that should probably never be forgotten. Memorials tell stories. Stories of the deaths that are in some way more significant than others and therefore, shouldn't be forgotten. Some memorials leave more room for imagination in their stories, while others tell more detailed and well documented ones. However, all of the memorials have the same goal, to make us remember not to forget these deaths. Not to forget what others sacrificed in order to make this world the way it is today and not to forget to be thankful for it.

## Monument aux Morts

The first memorial I saw, when I walked into Le Père Lachaise, was Monument aux Morts'. A massive, stunning and incredibly magnificent monument that stands on top of a slight hill. I recall scrolling through the internet and finding out that it was designed by Paul-Albert Bartholomé in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it is there to commemorate unknown Parisian people that died throughout the years. When I kept on reading, I remember, I found out that, the monument showed a scene of hell with two figures on top trying to escape the black door, which was placed behind them.

As there is no clear list of names of people for whom this memorial is or list of ways they died, I started imagining how those thousands of people could have passed away...

A few of them may have died in their sleep: it was a calm and peaceful death. A couple, might have died in a car crash: their car was completely crushed and their bodies were entangled in its frame after a tired truck driver fell asleep and drove his vehicle in the other lane. I assume that some chose suicide to interrupt their painful and problematic life. Perhaps, others, died due to famine and their inability to access basic necessities. Few could have faced hypothermia: a long and monotonous death. A couple of old people, probably died of heart attack due to extreme aging and, some young people may have died because of the same condition, but for an intense shot of adrenaline. Most probably a few women, men, youngsters and elderly people faced cancer without, daunting and atrociously, surviving in order to fulfil their happy lives.

Around 50, could have been trapped into fragments of an airplane that smashed noisily and tremendously fast on the ground. Maybe, 25 people were eaten and teared apart by a wild and enormous bear in a painful and tragic manner. Approximately, 40 individuals may have passed away because of shootings that happened in various locations such as jewellery shops, cinemas, museums, monuments and banks. Over 200 members of this planet could have been involved in numerous different wars that happened throughout the years without managing to survive.

Likely, many people remained captured into high and erupted flames created by fires inside houses, shops, buildings and parks. Perhaps, some others, might have died due to their poor management of swimming skills and drowned until their guts were filled with extremely high quantity of liquid that, at the end, suffocated them. Others could have chosen to drink large quantities of poison, either by mistake or, most likely, by choice to help them to die in a faster and more effective way. Throughout the years, continuous and repetitive deaths may have been caused by an overdose of drugs. Some of the deceased were probably killed in a murder.

Some desire death, some die unexpectedly, but one always dies.

## Remembering the victims of Air France Flight 447

While walking around the Père Lachaise cemetery, I saw that there are at least four memorials dedicated to people who have died in tragic airplane accidents. The most recent one had been built for the victims of the Air France flight 447 that flew from Rio de Janeiro to Paris on the 1st of June in 2009. It is a glass monument with 228 birds engraved on it symbolizing the people that died in the crash, or everyone on the flight. On the stone below there are the names of these people.

Some of these names I remembered hearing on the news. This tragedy was very widely publicized and talked about. Even though it happened around 8 years ago, some of the details of how it happened started to come back to me. I remembered that the tragic accident had happened due to a malfunction of the speed measuring devices, which had led the autopilot to deactivate itself. After this, the crew had made some mistakes in handling the situation and had caused the plane to crash into the Atlantic Ocean. Then there was a number that popped into my mind: 3.30. After a few minutes, I started remembering a low voice of a newscaster saying: From the moment that the devices stopped providing correct airspeed information to the moment the plane hit the ocean and was destroyed by the impact 3 minutes 30 seconds elapsed. However, what left the strongest impression in my memory was the headline that I saw on some newspaper which said: 'F\*\*\*, we're dead!' Cried Air France pilot minutes before plane crash. I also remember trying to imagine what the pilot was feeling at

that moment when he realized they were going to die, but couldn't do anything about it.

This memorial brought back to me a mix of things I heard, read and felt about the tragic accident. But most of all made me remember that everyone is human and makes mistakes, just some people's mistakes have larger consequences than those of others..

## Remembering those who died in the Holocaust

It is without a doubt that the Holocaust is one of the most tragic events to take place in Europe, if not the world. 6 million is not a small number. We spent an entire month in high school studying about the Holocaust. The most disturbing part for me was the inhumane treatment of such an entire group of people.

During World War II, Adolf Hitler attempted to cleanse the Jewish race from the face of the Earth, I think the technical term is ethnic cleansing. Some six million Jews were brutally killed. This type of mass murder could not have occurred without the aid of other states. Adolf Hitler allied with Belgium and France and some other countries to help.

The Germans occupied France, a regime that would be called the Vichy Regime. This regime limited the freedom of the Jewish population in France, basically depriving them of human rights, stripping them from humanity. The regime isolated the Jews from the rest of French society. Citizenship of all French Jews were revoked, even those who fought for the French. Imagine fighting for the freedom of a country, then being stripped of that citizenship. If you were Jewish, you did not belong to France. They were forced to shut down business, had their property stolen from them, and fired them jobs. At this point the Jewish population was at a vulnerable state. Synagogues were ordered by the regime to hand over list of their members to the authorities, the Jewish community was then being persecuted. Each and every name on that list was in threat. They were incarcerated, sent to their sites of murder, which were concentration camps, which is essentially where

they would become brutally murdered. If your name was on that list, you were facing an inevitable death.

Most concentration camps were located in the south of France, which is what I associate with Cannes and St Tropez, I feel bad now. The main concentration camp in France was Drancy, not too far from the City of Love, Paris. It was initially used for prisoners of war, however after the German occupation, it was transformed into a transit camp for detainees that would soon be deported to the East. Thousands of "jewish prisoners" would be deported on trains fit for a couple of hundred people. They would starve and were not provided with clean drinking water. Some Jews were even used as experiments. The Nazis even made soap out of remains of previous holocaust victims. The concentration camps were hell in disguise.

Now, those who died are being commemorated in a memorial, however most of the figures in the memorial are skeletal figures or are unrecognizable, lying down in exhaustion or doing physical labor. Footprints of different sizes can be recognized, even those of children.