

Becky's Corner: The happiest man on Earth

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NBC's The TODAY Show recently featured an awe-inspiring man, Eddie Jaku. He is 101 years old and a survivor of the Holocaust. Mr. Jaku has chosen to help inspire others to live their happiest lives.

In a speech he gave in 2019, he said just a smile from "one miserable person" can make him happy. His goal is to help others see the world in a more positive light.

If ever there was a time for Mr. Jaku's wisdom, it's now.

I find myself in awe of this man. His gentle yet formidable presence and after all he has gone through, he chooses happiness.

I listen to him and frankly, I feel ashamed of my ability to focus on really petty things that are of no consequence. I spend too much time ruminating on silly things and spending way too much energy on them. What I should be doing is practicing and mirroring the thoughts and acts of this gracious man.

On Nov. 9, 1938, after Nazi forces burned synagogues and destroyed Jewish homes, stores and other property, Mr. Jaku returned home from boarding school to an empty home. In the morning, he was taken to Buchenwald, one of the first concentration camps to be established.

Over the course of years, Mr. Jaku and his family reunited, escaped and lived in hiding. But in 1943, they were arrested again and sent to Auschwitz.

"I was finally transported to my hell on Earth, Auschwitz," he said. "My parents and my sister were also transported to Auschwitz, and I was never to see my parents again."

More than 6 million Jewish people were killed in the Holocaust. In 1945, Mr. Jaku was sent on a "death march" but escaped into the wilderness. He was rescued in June of that year.

"What I have seen, it is incredible," he said. "I tell this to people, but they don't want to believe it."

Mr. Jaku said that after the war, he was miserable – until he met his wife, Flore, and started a family.

"Eighty years ago, I didn't think I will have a wife and children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren," he said. "And this is a blessing."

Mr. Jaku said that despite his experiences, he does not hate anyone.

"Hate is a disease that may destroy your enemy, but will also destroy you in the process," he said in his 2019 TED Talk.

"Where there is life is hope. If there's no more hope, you're finished," he added.

Family and friends are key to that hope, Mr. Jaku said.

"Friendship is priceless," he said. "Shared sorrow is half sorrow, but shared pleasure is double."

Over the course of his long life, Mr. Jaku said that he's learned that "this life can be beautiful, if you make it beautiful."

"I speak about happiness, I speak (about) what life can be," he said. "If you are healthy, you're a multimillionaire."

He said that he hopes his story inspires others to make positive choices every day.

"I want to make this world a better place for everyone," Mr. Jaku said. "I want everyone to take a step back and say 'We are here for all of us.'"

I'm convinced that something divine in our lives puts people like Mr. Jaku in our path. The Mr. Jaku's of the world come along when we need them most. They wake us up, causing us to reflect on where we've been, where we are now and where we want to go. We suddenly remember that, yes, we have a choice. Let's hope we all make the choice Mr. Jaku would like us to make.

Thank you Mr. Jaku for your incredible story, your drive to make us better and for the gentle spirit that lives in you – even after all you've been through.