

European Seminar Has Classroom Benefits

Lex Suite and Judy Stanley were interested in the Holocaust, but participating in last summer's THC-organized teachers seminar to Europe deepened their knowledge, they said.

This year, the two are applying in their classrooms the knowledge they gleaned during the seminar, which brought nine Tennessee educators to Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic for 13 days.

The THC group joined a study tour, organized by Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, to Berlin, Warsaw, Krakow, Kielce, Lodz, Prague and several towns and villages. The tour included the concentration camps, labor camps and death camps of Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Treblinka, Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Treblinka and Lidice.

Suite, principal of Atwood's West Carroll Junior/Senior High School, had participated in various THC events, including a seminar at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2000. Hearing a Holocaust survivor speak at the USHMM session, said Suite, brought home the "pathos and humanity of the situation."

Visiting Auschwitz last summer, however, "was overwhelming," he said. "I was not prepared for the death factory [the Nazis] set up. I was not prepared for the stark realism. To see [victims'] possessions—pots, pans, shoes—gave a human touch. We'd go into a beautiful city, like Krakow or Berlin, then spend hours touring the concentration camps and hiding places—so you're exhilarated, then you see the [camps], and it reinforces why you came."

Suite incorporated the experience into his world history class. Suite has led exercises that he calls, "What would you do?" He presents a scenario and asks students to write essays on how they'd respond. For example: "You're Jewish, and you got an order to report to the train station tomorrow. What would you do?"



Tennessee teachers and Commission Chair Felicia Anchor pose at a statue of Jan Karski, the heroic Polish non-Jew who brought word to the West about the destruction of the Jews of Poland in 1942. From the left, standing: Judy Stanley, Lisa Sikes, Henry Camp, Lex Suite, Lyn Newman, Steve Sessis and Sandra Roberts. Immediately behind Anchor (seated) are Carol Beene and Joy McCaleb.

"I might not have thought of that question had I not stood on the railroad tracks in Berlin or read the five or six books in preparation for the trip," said Suite. "Going to Berlin, Auschwitz-Birkenau really had an effect."

Stanley, an English and journalism teacher at Springfield High School, said that she has been "passionate" about the Holocaust for 10 years. She has attended THC conferences at Vanderbilt for the past seven years.

Stanley and her husband visited the Dachau camp once, but when she heard of the THC seminar, "I knew I had to go," she said. "I felt that I'd never have another opportunity to go. I'd be able to see more of the museums and camps, and hear people talk about it who'd been there, than I could ever do myself."

For both Suite and Stanley, a defining moment of the seminar was being guided

through Auschwitz. In one barracks, a survivor, Nina Kaleska, told the group that her sister had died in her arms in the camp. "The guide stopped in her tracks, crying, and Nina took over," Stanley said. Added Suite: "That really put a face on the stuff you read about."

This school year, when Oprah Winfrey publicized an essay contest about Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which the television hostess added to her book club, Stanley offered her students the chance to enter. Stanley said that 10 students wrote essays, including an exchange student from Germany. Stanley was surprised to learn from the girl that German schools emphasize the Holocaust more than do most American schools.

"Knowing more about the Holocaust helped me to relate to her, from having been in an area near where she lived,"

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From the Chair...



The author stands next to the memorial stone to the town of Czestochowa, Poland, her father's birthplace, in the garden of stones at Treblinka.

In this edition of the *Flame*, we highlight a long-term dream of the Commission come true. This past summer I was able to lead a group of nine educators from across Tennessee to visit and study at primary sites where the history and events of the Holocaust occurred.

Such an undertaking requires the commitment of time and money. It also requires a commitment to ensure, that as time passes, the significance of the Holocaust is not diminished or reinterpreted.

The generous support of special donors underwrote a significant portion of the trip. Each teacher received a scholarship to cover one-half of the cost of travel. I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to Jack Belz and Ira Lipman for supporting teacher development and excellence.

Their ongoing commitment to recognizing outstanding Holocaust educators in Tennessee, through the presentation of the annual Belz-Lipman Awards, recognizes the level and quality of Holocaust education in our state. Their support of this trip enhanced this goal. The Mills Corporation, with the aid of James Dausch, helped us in the development of our Educator's Resource Trunks that are located in school systems throughout the state. The Mills Corporation further extended its support by providing financial assistance to the teachers who made the trip to Europe. We extend our most sincere appreciation to them for their help with these scholarships.

This generosity and commitment to our work impacts every region of Tennessee as our educators return to their classrooms and share what they have learned with their students and community. Without the wonderful financial support of these donors, such a trip would not have been possible. I know that each member of our Tennessee entourage joins me in expressing his or her sincere gratitude.

The memories and experiences of our trip will remain with us forever. Even as we stood at the railhead at Auschwitz-Birkenau together, we knew that we shared an obligation to return home and tell what we saw. All of us are committed to doing just that. The support of our donors made the trip for these educators possible. We hope to repeat this educational experience in the future.

Sincerely,
Felicia F. Anchor,
Commission Chair

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Stanley said. “I think that we should use the Holocaust to teach students about having more respect, about kindness and tolerance of differences.”

Both teachers said that they hoped THC will continue sponsoring such seminars in Europe. “It would be good for any teacher” to participate in, Stanley said,

adding, “Someone who’s a guidance counselor or an administrator would benefit, because they could learn about people who are different and about how people who seem civil can be evil. We have a responsibility to remind our students that we can be very inhumane if we’re not careful. ... I don’t think that you can go

on a trip like this and not become a more compassionate person.”

But, echoing Suite, Stanley added, “I saw so much, learned so much. I don’t think I’ll be able to process all of this for a long, long time.”



Judy Stanley (right) and two survivors who accompanied the Lest We Forget Study Tour, Dr. Emanuel Tanay and Nina Kaleska.



Joy McCaleb enjoys a rose garden in Poland.



Monument to the Ghetto uprising in Warsaw, Poland in April 1943 in which Jewish resistance fighters held out for four weeks.



Memorial to the children of the village of Lidice, Czech Republic. The villagers were massacred after the Czech underground shot Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich in 1942.

E-Updates

THC has launched a service of periodic updates highlighting programs and opportunities. If you would like to be included, send an E-mail to anne.f.plummer@vanderbilt.edu. Be sure to tell us your name, address, school affiliation, level and subjects taught (if applicable) and your E-mail address.

Limor Outreach Program Highlights Children Rescued During Holocaust

Trapped in the Warsaw ghetto in early 1943, Adam and Julia Melcer knew that they would be deported to concentration camps and certain death. They arranged to smuggle out their three-year-old daughter Alicja to a Christian family. “Do whatever you want. Just keep her alive,” Julia, interviewed for a 2002 documentary, *Secret Lives*, recalled telling the family.

Alicja lived with the Jamulkovsky family for six months in Warsaw, and for another month with the Jamulkovskys’ relatives in the countryside. She later lived in Kasowicze with a German-Polish couple until World War II ended.

Miraculously, both Adam, sent to Dachau, and Julia, sent to Auschwitz, survived the war. They retrieved Julia from Kasowicze and later settled in New York City.

“I was convinced all those years that I was in hiding that she was dead,” Alicja said in the film. “She looked terrible. My father came back and he looked human. I really didn’t believe that she was my mother.”

Alicja Melcer, now Alice Sondike, appeared as a guest speaker at a day-long seminar on children who were hidden during the Holocaust. The seminar was held at Vanderbilt University last October 25 and sponsored by the Tennessee Holocaust Commission’s Irvin and Elizabeth Limor Educational Outreach Program. The event, for middle and high school teachers and students, included a screening of the film.

Francis Cutler, another child of Polish Jews whose parents sent her into hiding, also spoke at the program, as did Jaap Penraat, a Dutch non-Jew who forged documents on his father’s printing press and smuggled Jews out of the country, and Patti Van Eys, a Vanderbilt assistant professor of psychology.

The outreach program focused on the small fraction of Jewish children who were saved during World War II by Christian families throughout Europe, who raised and sheltered them until 1945 and sometimes beyond. The presentations and discussion covered such



Frances Cutler (right, holding doll), a hidden child from France, plays checkers at a home for Jewish orphans, 1946.

issues as what the children’s and rescuers’ lives were like during the war and afterwards, the emotional effects on them and their surviving parents, and the rescuers’ motivations in protecting the Jewish children.

Sondike had spoken previously on her experiences, including at the United Nations and at the showing of *Secret Lives* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Appearing at Vanderbilt, she spoke of “the miracle” of both parents surviving the concentration camps, especially of how her mother escaped a death march by pretending to be struck by an Allied bomb, falling into a ditch and hiding there.

In addition to teaching at Vanderbilt, Van Eys works at a clinic, seeing neglected and abused children who are in, or are headed into, state custody. She is an expert on the effects on children of trauma and attachment disruptions. Van Eys said that she “wasn’t sure” how speaking at the seminar would go, given that she had no experience in dealing with child survivors of the Holocaust.

Van Eys decided to speak generally about children she had examined who had gone through family crises.

“I talked about attachment processes, loss and trauma. What we know about developing brains from birth to age two years old is that there’s a critical time in the attachment process, which is important for three things,” Van Eys said. She explained that when an adult is sensitive to a child’s needs, the child learns to

“self soothe” when upset. Secondly, children at that age learn to trust, which enables them to develop healthy relationships. In addition, Van Eys said, that period is when a child’s self-esteem is established.

After the screening of *Secret Lives*, Van Eys described the loss, sometimes multiple losses, a child might have experienced in hiding. Such children, even after the Holocaust, “must have been exceedingly confused” because “they didn’t have an explanation for why this was happening.”

One of the most poignant scenes in *Secret Lives* demonstrates this observation. Julia Melcer (who passed away in 2003), with Sondike at her side, said of her daughter’s post-war demeanor, “She loved everybody else, except me, and I didn’t blame her. I knew that’s the way it was. You cannot love a person because



A Jewish child in hiding poses with members of the Dutch family that adopted her. Photo: USHMM archives.

they say [they’re] your mother. Anyway, now she loves me.”

Sondike continues to seek explanations. Adam, now 92, was excited that she and her cousin met with the Jamulkovsky family in Poland this past summer, visited Krakow and Auschwitz-Birkenau and attended a conference in Amsterdam on hidden children. But when she returned to America, filled with questions, her father “wouldn’t answer,” Sondike said. “He fumbled around and finally said, ‘I don’t want to talk about it.’ ”

“Living On” in Clarksville

When a friend suggested that he mount the *Living On: Portraits of Tennessee Survivors and Liberators* photographic exhibition, Customs House Museum and Cultural Center director Ned Crouch was skeptical.

He conjured a “wretched image” of rolls of barbed wire and piles of bodies and teeth, Crouch said.

Then he and the friend went to Nashville’s Frist Center for the Visual Arts to see for themselves, and Crouch did an about-face. “We were struck by their size: so dramatic, poignant, striking, forceful,” he said. “These faces stare at you from the wall. They’re accompanied by great text. A few people in the gallery were moved by a few and couldn’t read any more. Others read every word.”

When he returned to Clarksville, Crouch arranged to host the exhibition, and it ran from last September 29 through December 31 in the 1898 building, which once was a center of the region’s tobacco trade.

The museum was the first to display all 62 subjects in the exhibition, which portrays Tennesseans who are Holocaust survivors or who helped liberate concentration camps while serving in the U.S. military.

At the center of the gallery, staff placed an abstract, limestone fountain and filled it with hundreds of polished black stones. The fountain “added to the drama,” Crouch said. When he was told that the stones were appropriate, given the Jewish custom of placing a stone on a loved one’s grave, Crouch said that he “got goose bumps.”

The photographs were taken by Robert Heller and the accompanying biographical text was written by Dawn Weiss Smith. The Tennessee Holocaust Commission conceived the project and has managed it from the start.

After a two-month winter run at Western Kentucky University, the exhibition now is at Memphis’s National Civil Rights Museum. In the summer and fall, it will travel to the East Tennessee Historical Society and to Lambuth University by the end of 2006.

The Customs House also hosted a series of events connected to the exhibition. Local schoolchildren attended the opening and met several Holocaust survivors. The survivors thanked Maj. Michael Ritchart of the 101st Airborne Division from Fort Campbell, considering his presence as representing the Americans who had liberated several concentration camps.

“It was a nice, spontaneous moment that never will be forgotten by anyone who was there,” said the exhibition’s guest curator, Susan Knowles.

One event included a panel discussion that featured two survivors and a non-Jewish prisoner of the Nazis now living in Clarksville along with THC chair Felicia Anchor. Another was the screening of a 2004 documentary, *Living On: Tennesseans Remembering the Holocaust*, by Will Pedigo a filmmaker for Nashville Public Television on the development of *Living On*. A third was a full-day workshop for teachers that included two survivor speakers from Nashville and several World War II veterans who fought in Europe.

In a side gallery were displayed several items of the late Bill Ledbetter, a local printer and U.S. Army veteran who had entered Buchenwald when it was liberated. The display included Ledbetter’s diary and letters to his parents about his experience that day in Buchenwald.

“The exhibit worked so well on so many plains,” said Crouch. “Not only did it tell a story through the text, but, aesthetically — even without any text — the photo-

graphs looked so dramatic, so strong individually. You were drawn in because of their uniqueness.”

He added, “The project was so well rounded. As a museum director, you couldn’t ask for better. That’s what museums aspire to do: education, connection, identification. When it comes off, and you get such a response of letters and comments that [reveal that] it really was meaningful, it’s so rewarding.”

Crouch continues to receive mail from museum members who write of their positive, educational experience. One person told Crouch that he had not wanted to visit the exhibition, but came four times.

Knowles said that she was gratified by the response to the Customs House showing. “There’s a certain audience for history, and I think that this has gone beyond that,” she said. “It’s not just learning history. It feels like something that’s very much alive — and that’s exactly what the Tennessee Holocaust Commission was founded to do: to connect people and keep the memory alive. People are picking up on different aspects of it and making it their own.”



Eva and Eric Rosenfeld sit on a stone fountain in the center of a Customs House gallery filled by teachers. All are listening to guest curator Susan Knowles provide an introduction to the *Living On* exhibition. (Photo credit: Alicia Archuletta, *The Leaf Chronicle*, Clarksville.)



Ned Crouch, director of the Customs House Museum and Cultural Center, and his wife Jacqueline talk with photographer Rob Heller at the preview reception for Living On. In March, the Customs House was recognized by the Tennessee Association of Museums with an award of "superlative achievement" for its educational programming associated with the Living On exhibition.



Steve Kordisch, a teacher from Northeast High School in Clarksville, explores the Living On exhibition at the Customs House Museum during an all-day teacher seminar. (Photo credit: Alicia Archuletta, The Leaf Chronicle, Clarksville.)



Julian Hosnedl (center), a non-Jewish survivor and political prisoner of Dachau, talks with Danny Wyatt (to his left) and another Clarksville resident following his presentation at the Customs House Museum. (Photo credit: Alicia Archuletta, The Leaf Chronicle, Clarksville.)

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