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*Group photo of participants on trip to Washington May 2010 taken in front of the Canadian Embassy.*

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND HOLOCAUST STUDIES PROGRAM IN WASHINGTON : A GIFT FROM THE ASPER FOUNDATION

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The Asper Foundation Human Rights & Holocaust Studies Program is a fantastic program. It gives students the opportunity to learn, grow, and have fun! The program is more than just a trip to Washington. It is a five month process that the students experience to learn about human rights and the Holocaust.

This process began with informative weekly classes. In these classes, we discussed various human rights related issues and problems in today's society. We also studied the novel *Night* by Elie Wiesel. Elie was a teenager just like us when he was taken to a concentration camp. It was amazing to learn how much our life styles differ and just how lucky we are to be living in Canada in 2010.

One very memorable class I recall is when we had the privilege of listening to a Holocaust survivor. To be in the same room and to be able to hear Isaac Gotfried's story

was truly an emotional and powerful class. I vividly recall the horrific stories he told us that day and I suspect his story will be with me forever.

After nine classes, it was finally time for us to travel to Washington. Being in the capital city of the United States was very exciting. Washington is a beautiful city that is full of history and important landmarks. We learned so much while we were there. We visited the Lincoln Memorial, the Jefferson Memorial, and the White House; all visits came with very interesting information. Our trip also took in tours of several fascinating museums such as; the Museum of Natural History, the Air and Space Museum, the Newseum and, of course, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

The Holocaust Memorial Museum was a strong, interactive experience. As I walked through the museum, I could imagine the horrific details of the Holocaust. The videos and the images painted vivid pictures of the events that occurred so that visitors could try to feel the pain that the Holocaust victims experienced. Walking through a real cattle car, I felt shivers shooting down my

spine thinking of the hundreds of people who were packed in there like lifeless sardines.

Visiting the Holocaust Memorial Museum reinforced the lessons that I learned in the classes prior to the trip. It really showed me how important it is to not stand by and let things happen but make your voice heard. Realizing that so much death and horror could have been stopped was truly an awful feeling. Seeing the shoes of some of the people who died in the Holocaust really put into perspective just how many people suffered.

The classes and trip to Washington have impacted my life today. Also impacting my life was the graduation ceremony that was held at Tec Voc High School two weeks after our return. Part of that graduation ceremony involved presentations by all the groups reflecting on our experiences. Our journey was concluded by signing the Memorandum for Personal Responsibility. In signing the Memorandum, I felt the importance of fulfilling my duty to ensure that human rights will be respected and protected.

I am now more grateful for everything that I have - whether it is food, family or education. Just knowing that someone during the Holocaust may have died for any of those things makes me realize that I am very lucky.

This program has also heightened my respect for people who stand up against violence and for human rights. Obviously to do anything like that takes a great deal of courage. It is unfortunate that more people did not do so during the Holocaust. We have to commend all those who are standing up now.

Overall, the Asper Foundation Human Rights & Holocaust Studies Program is educational and very worthwhile. Anyone who is given the opportunity should definitely take part in this program. I am grateful I did.