



Calgary Herald  
May 21, 2008

David S. Holloway for Canwest News Service

**"Survivor volunteer" Louise Lawrence-Israels poses with Canadian students at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington on Tuesday.**

# Holocaust saga enthralls students

ALLEN ABEL

FOR CANWEST NEWS SERVICE  
WASHINGTON

**L**ouise Lawrence-Israels pinned on a bright yellow star, the wartime badge of racial subjugation, transmuted now into a symbol of remembrance and hope.

In the audience as she spoke Tuesday at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were 300 Canadian high school and junior high school students, enthralled by the saga of a baby girl from Holland who was forbidden to laugh or cry out loud, or even to know her real name.

"My mother called me Maria to hide the fact that I was a Jew, and I never knew my name until the war was over," Lawrence-Israels told visiting participants of The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program, recalling a childhood of privation and seclusion in an Amsterdam apartment that endured years of air-raid sirens, fear of betrayal to the Nazi occupiers, and near-starvation warded off by tulip bulb stew.

Students in the audience wore a silver star, emblematic of participation in a program that has brought more than 6,000 young Canadians to Washington over the past decade, while educating thousands more in every Canadian province and territory about the horrors of the Holocaust and the spectre of racial and ethnic genocide that still haunts the modern world.

"We had lived across the street from a park for three years," said Lawrence-Israels, one of 80 "survivor volunteers" at the museum, "but we had never been outside, we had never even gone down the stairs. The day after Amsterdam

was liberated by the Canadians in 1945, my mother took me and my brother to play in that grassy field. But we had no idea what it meant to play outside, without walls or fences; we just stood there crying. And my mother, finally seeing her children standing free in a park, I think she cried the rest of the day."

Her parents had vowed never to speak of the war, or to speak the names of the 70 family members exterminated by the Nazis. But, as the Canadian students learned on their visit, silence in the face of genocide is a course destined to lead only to more hatred, more separation and more tragedy.

"The next generation is not going to have the opportunity to hear the survivors first-hand," said Elishua Ben-Choreen of Yitzhak Rabin High School in Nepean, Ont. "It's our responsibility to continue to learn about the Holocaust so that we can teach others about the Holocaust."

The tale of the sequestered childhood of Lawrence-Israels struck a chord with Sammy Diamantstein, also from Yitzhak Rabin. Both of his grandmothers survived the Holocaust, one by being hidden at a Catholic convent in Poland, the other by being selected for a labour brigade at the Auschwitz concentration camp, moments before she was to have been sent to the gas chamber.

"The Jewish Holocaust was unique in some aspects of its propaganda and political demonization of the Jews," Diamantstein said. "But even though there might not be another Jewish Holocaust, there is still the threat of genocide in Darfur and in other places. The danger is ceaseless, unless one speaks out."