



## Canadian students in Holocaust studies program learn from real survivor

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WASHINGTON - In the 62 years since Susan Taube was liberated from a Nazi extermination camp, the horrible details of the Holocaust sometimes dissolve into a jumbled blur of unbearable memories.

But if there's one thing the 81-year-old survivor will always remember, it is the ease with which the Nazis killed. Whether it was shooting an elderly woman for becoming too ill to sweep sidewalks in the Jewish ghetto, or shipping thousands to die in a gas chamber, the Nazis murdered with a casual indifference to their victims' humanity.

"People were killed for no reason," Taube told a group of 250 Canadian students who were visiting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington on Tuesday. "They just took the gun, and you were shot."

Taube's harrowing account of a childhood spent living through "different phases of hell" in Hitler's Europe prompted an emotional response from her teenage audience, in Washington as part of the **Asper Foundation** Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program.

Many of the students, already deeply moved after touring the museum exhibits, crowded around Taube for impromptu hugs and expressions of gratitude. "It's really important to meet people like her, because we are the last generation who will get to hear the stories of Holocaust survivors first hand," said 15-year-old Meghan Plotnick, a Grade 10 student from Vincent Massey secondary school in Windsor, Ont.

"It's up to us to carry on the message of the Holocaust to make sure it will never happen again."

For the young Canadians, Taube's speech capped 18 hours of intensive study designed to raise their awareness of the Holocaust and of the need to fight racism and religious intolerance in the 21st century.

"The message I take is that this should never be done again," said Alexander Paolozzi, a 17-year-old from Marshall McLuhan high school in Toronto.

In interviews after the event, Paolozzi and several other students drew parallels between the Holocaust and modern-day genocides in places like Rwanda and Darfur.

"The most important thing to take out of this experience is that education is the most powerful tool against hatred," said Lyndon Lyons, 15, also of Windsor's Vincent Massey school. "The only way to prevent another Holocaust is to educate people so they know the consequences of racism and stereotypes and discrimination."

Jennifer Cabral, a 17-year-old student from Marshall McLuhan, said she was shocked that world leaders have been so slow to take action in Darfur.

"After the experience of the Holocaust, you would think the world would be more aware of what's occurring," Cabral said.

The Canadian teens spent several hours this week touring the Holocaust museum, which tells the story of six million victims through photographs, artifacts and the personal effects of the dead.

The students stood in a cattle car used to ship Jews to extermination camps, saw the piles of shoes collected from victims before they entered the gas chambers, and heard voice recordings of survivors.

"We tell our stories because the world has to know," said Taube, who was born in the German town of Vacha, where her family had lived for 400 years. "These children listened to me and they can say 'I met a survivor. She was real. She was there.'"

Taube's father escaped to the United States before the Second World War, but her grandmother, mother and sister all died during a decade-long ordeal that began in the 1930s.

Expelled from their home town, Taube and her family were eventually shipped between concentration camps in Germany and Jewish ghettos in cities like Riga, Latvia.

"I am the only one who managed to come out of it," she said.

Although she kept her personal history private for decades, Taube began speaking out in recent years in order to remind people how quickly societies can turn against each other.

"We are all human beings. We all have red blood, whether we are white, brown or black, we are all human beings."

The Holocaust Studies program was launched a decade ago by the late Israel Asper as a way to use history to teach Canadian students about tolerance. Asper founded Canwest Global Communications Inc., whose media holdings include Global Television and CanWest newspapers across Canada.

Since the program began, almost 5,000 students from 82 cities have participated. More than 900 students took part in this year's visit to Washington.

Moe Levy, executive director of the **Asper Foundation**, said he plans to make the new Canadian Museum of Human Rights a focal point of the human rights program in the future. Ottawa recently committed \$100 million for construction of the museum, which is set to open in Winnipeg by 2011.

"The whole reason for creating the museum is to teach Canadian kids and give them the Canadian experience," Levy said.

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