

Human rights journey has big impact

KIRSTEN MUNDY
Standard Reporter

There are 12 Strathmore High School students who have seen what it is to be persecuted based solely on your race or religion and have decided to do whatever they can to prevent that from happening again.

Following 14 Wednesday night courses about human rights the students had the opportunity to travel to Washington D.C. earlier this year where they visited the Holocaust Museum. It was the first time many of them had really seen what it was like for the millions of people who were a part of the genocide during World War II.

The work they did prior to being chosen, the nominations, essays and letters of recommendation was nothing compared to the work they did before the trip with the Asper Foundation.

Tricia Bezzeg was the teacher who organized the event and she said they're hoping to do it again next year because the students learned so much. It was also a trip that hugely affected her as she was with them through all the classes and museum trips.

The evening classes included videos and images in addition to regular classroom materials. Gerard Michielsen said it was those images and videos that really impacted him. Regardless of what you hear you can never experience the full impact of what happened without the aid of those images.

"I didn't know that they (Germans) had elected Hitler," said Casey Tucker. "It made me think that it could have been stopped much earlier in the process."

Following the human rights classes and 25 hours of community service students finally headed out to Washington to see the Holocaust Museum.

It was the museum that really made them understand what it was like for those millions of people. More than 6.5 million Jewish people and 5.5 million people of other descent,



PHOTO COURTESY STRATHMORE HIGH SCHOOL

The 12 Strathmore High School students above had the opportunity to travel to Washington D.C. earlier this year to tour the Holocaust Museum through an Asper Foundation program that teaches youth about human rights.

to be a little more precise.

"I guess what will change our lives is seeing what everyone went through during the Holocaust. The way it overwhelmed everybody," said Steven Altman.

The way Hitler went about taking away the rights of Jewish people in Germany was shocking for the students who went. It wasn't just one day or one decision that took away all their rights, it was a slow process that people just didn't object to enough.

"How systematic it was," is what shocked Brandon Nelson.

The numbers of people who were affected by the Holocaust were really driven home by one particular exhibit; there was a collection of shoes, which is all that is left of many of the victims of the genocide.

"It was the fact that entire generations were wiped out because one man didn't like one race," said Scott Hatton. "It's just not right."

The feeling of the museum was such that students found they were changed while they were inside.

"My attitude changed while I was there," said Altman. "I just felt really claustrophobic. I walked into the museum and I already felt

sick to my stomach.

The trip to the museum was a little different for one student. While looking at the list of those who helped people escape the genocide Caitlin Smith found she had relatives who were listed.

"It was just this big rush of pride," said Smith.

The present state of our world is something students are also hoping they can impact. Maglaie Knopf recently traveled to Haiti with other Strathmore residents and said it gave her a very intimate look at what life is like for most of the world's residents. The genocides that are still happening are her major concern though.

"It's still going on but we're still silent about it," said Knopf. "Learning about that makes me want to do more."

Hatton said he's now doing whatever he can to teach other people about what's going on with those situations. For Brennan Jones the trip overall was a life changing experience.

"We learned lots, about the holocaust (and) human rights," said Jones in a written submission about the trip.

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