

## WORLD

# 'It was eye-opening'

## Canadian students learn the darker lessons of history at U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

BY SHELDON ALBERTS

WASHINGTON • There are things that can't be learned from textbooks alone, things that need to be seen to be understood.

After visiting the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Monday, Vancouver high school student Marina Favaro knew that more than ever.

The painstakingly recreated exhibits housed in this formidable institution include the physical evidence of a genocide that claimed six million lives: cattle cars that carried Jews to the death camps, bunk beds on which prisoners slept in Auschwitz, piles of shoes collected from victims before they were killed.

"They stripped everything from the Jewish people. Everything was valuable to the Germans except for their lives," said 16-year-old Favaro, a Grade 11 student at Vancouver Technical School. "It's appalling."

Favaro was among several hundred Canadian students who bore personal witness Monday to the horrors of the Holocaust — and learned the vital importance of human rights — at a memorial that frequently reduces visitors to tears.

The teenagers were participating in an annual trip to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, sponsored by the Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program.

It was the emotional capstone to an 18-hour educational program that teaches the history of the Holocaust as part of a larger message to students about tolerance and the need to take action to stop modern-day genocides.

"It was eye-opening. We knew what the facts were, but we didn't see the background. It has a big impact on me, seeing what these people went through," said Laura Brager, 14, a Grade 9 student from Calgary. Brager was taken aback by the sight of a pile of Holocaust victims' shoes.

"That really hit me hard, knowing those prisoners were wearing those shoes before they died. It was really powerful."

Eric Chan, a 17-year-old Vancouver Technical School student, said the Holocaust museum visit helped

him better understand "the intensity of the experience" for victims and the responsibility "to do our part" to prevent human rights abuses today.

For Favaro, whose passion for social justice began when she read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the museum visit reinforced her own conviction that today's youth must speak out against injustice.

"It visualizes what we have been learning. It is indispensable. The horrors that the people have through ... we need to look at people as one race, the human race," she said.

It was the same message delivered to the Canadian students by Louise Lawrence-Israels, a Holocaust survivor whose Dutch family hid in the attic of an Amsterdam walk-up apartment building for almost three years during the war.

Lawrence-Israels spent her infant and toddler years totally isolated from the outside world.

However, she considers herself lucky. More than 1.5 million children were killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

"What I cannot forget or forgive is that people let it happen. They didn't say anything," Lawrence-Israels said.

Lawrence-Israels's message had personal meaning for 14-year-old Josh Michnowski, a Grade 9 student from Calgary.

Michnowski's grandmother, Susan Gold, was a "hidden child" during the Second World War, who spent years in an underground bunker in Poland as the Nazis hunted for Jews.

Michnowski carried with him to Washington a copy of his grandmother's memoir, *The Eyes Are the Same: A Holocaust Memoir*.

"We just need to remember what happened, for the future, and make sure nothing like this ever happens again."

The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program has brought almost 9,400 high school students from 116 Canadian cities to the U.S. capital since 1997.

The program formed the starting point for the \$310-million Canadian Museum of Human Rights. The museum, which is under construction in Winnipeg, is projected to open in 2013.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper designated the museum as a federal institution, the first national museum to be built outside the national capital region. So far \$160 million has been allocated to the project by the federal government, the Manitoba government and the City of Winnipeg.