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Human rights program gives kids insight into Holocaust, genocide

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Canwest News Service

WASHINGTON — After months spent studying the genocide of Jews during the Second World War, 14-year-old Eliza Kraus had grown familiar with all the painful details of the Holocaust. She learned about the brutality of the Nazis, the squalor of the Jewish ghettos, and Adolf Hitler's "final solution."

But when she finally visited the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum yesterday, and stepped inside a cattle car used to transport European Jews to Nazi concentration camps, the Calgary teenager was left speechless with emotion. "Walking through the

boxcar, I didn't even know what to say because I knew hundreds of people were crammed into that little space with no food, no water and they were in there for days," says Kraus, a Grade 9 student at the Calgary French and International School.

"It helps you understand more what they felt, and it means more to me because of that."

Kraus is among 250 teens in Washington this week completing a human-rights program that helps educate Canadian students about the history of the Holocaust and the dangers of racial intolerance and hatred.

The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program has

brought more than 7,000 students from 110 Canadian cities to the U.S. capital in recent years.

On several of the stops at the Holocaust museum, Louise Lawrence-Israels has been there to tell them her harrowing tale of survival.

For an hour yesterday in the museum's Meyerhoff Theater, Lawrence-Israels held the students riveted with details of more than two years spent hiding in Holland from the Nazis.

After the war, Lawrence-Israels told the students she grew up with a visceral hatred and fear of Germans. She only realized how damaging that feeling was when it became manifest in her own children.

"I realized it then — hatred begets hatred. That's how the Holocaust started."

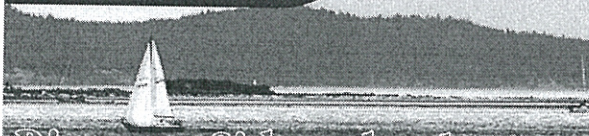
Lawrence-Israels' message to the Canadian students is that genocides can only happen if people fail to stop hatred and racial prejudice when they see it start.

The Holocaust Studies program was launched in 1997 by the late Israel Asper. Asper founded Canwest Global Communications Inc.

The program formed the starting point for the \$100-million Canadian Museum of Human Rights, which began construction last month in Winnipeg.

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