

# Holocaust museum opens students' eyes to horrors of racial intolerance

## Canadian teens moved to tears by exhibit in Washington

SHELDON ALBERTS  
*Canwest News  
Washington Correspondent*  
WASHINGTON

After months of 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 Hitler's "final solution."

But when she finally visited the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on Monday, and stepped inside a cattle car used to transport European Jews to Nazi concentration camps, the Calgary teenager was left speechless.

"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.

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

Kraus is among 250 teenagers in Washington this week completing a human-rights program that educates 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. It's

a visit that can leave its participants drained and motivated to speak out against modern-day human-rights abuses.

This year, more than 1,100 students have taken part in the program. At the Holocaust museum, Louise Lawrence-Israels has been there to tell them her harrowing tale of survival.

For an hour Monday, Lawrence-Israels held the students riveted with details of more than two years spent hiding in Holland from the Nazis with her parents and older brother.

Only six months old when her family was confined to a tiny Amsterdam apartment, some of Lawrence-Israels' memories come in the form of stories passed on from her father and verified by a family friend who shared the confined space.

Others are the hazy first-hand recollections of childhood. Of answering to a fake name, Maria. Of never being allowed to yell, or argue, or look out the tiny dormer window of the apartment for fear of being seen and identified as a Jew. Of surviving on cookies her father cooked over a camp stove.

After the war, Lawrence-Israels, now 66, told the students she grew up with a 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 genocide can only happen if people fail to stop hatred and racial prejudice when they see it start to take hold in individuals and societies.

"The entire point of coming here is to remember, this did happen, and to make sure it doesn't happen again," said Alex Lee, 14, also a Calgary student.

"What's happening in places like Darfur, with civilians being murdered and raped — it's a lot like what happened during the Holocaust."

Erin Wadsworth, a 14-year-old ninth grader from Toronto, said she has learned to "become less judgmental" because of her study of human-rights issues and abuses.

Her own visit to the Holocaust museum's cattle car exhibit left her in tears.

"It was devastating," she said. "It's very heartbreaking to learn about genocide, but worth it."

The Holocaust Studies program was launched in 1997 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, including *The Journal*.

The program formed the starting point for the \$100-million Canadian Museum of Human Rights, which began construction last month in Winnipeg and is slated for opening in 2012.