

Canadian kids learn Holocaust horrors

Asper Foundation sends 300 to U.S. museum

ALLEN ABEL
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Louise Lawrence-Israels pinned on a bright yellow star, the wartime badge of racial subjugation, transmuted now into a symbol of remembrance and hope.

In the audience as she spoke yesterday at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were 300 Canadian high school and junior high school students, enthralled by the saga of a baby from Holland who was forbidden to laugh or cry, or even know her real name.

"My mother called me Maria to hide the fact that I was a Jew, and I never knew my name until the war was over," Lawrence-Israels told visiting partici-

pants of The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program, recalling a childhood of privation and seclusion in an Amsterdam apartment that endured years of air-raid sirens, fear of betrayal to the Nazi occupiers, and near-starvation warded off by tulip bulb stew.

Students in the audience wore a silver star, emblematic of participation in a program that has brought more than 6,000 young Canadians to Washington over the past decade, while educating thousands more in every Canadian province and territory about the horrors of the Holocaust and the spectre of racial and ethnic genocide in the modern world.

"We had lived across the street from a park for three years," said Lawrence-Israels, one of 80 "survivor volunteers" at the museum, "but we had never been outside, we had never even gone down the stairs. The day after Amsterdam was liberated by the Canadians in 1945, my mother took me and my brother to

play in that grassy field. But we had no idea what it meant to play outside, without walls or fences; we just stood there crying. And my mother, finally seeing her children standing free in a park, I think she cried the rest of the day."

As part of their preparation for the trip to Washington, students helped raise money for the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which will be built in Winnipeg. The building, Canada's first national museum outside the Ottawa region, is a natural outgrowth of The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program, and the fruit of the late Israel Asper's desire to fight intolerance and hatred wherever it arises, said Moe Levy, executive director of The Asper Foundation.

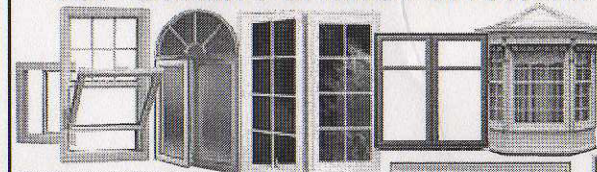
The Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program was created a decade ago by Asper, founder of Canwest Global Communications Corp., whose media holdings include Global Television and Canwest newspapers, including The Gazette.

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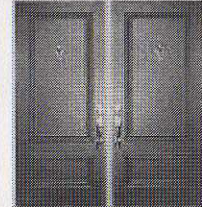
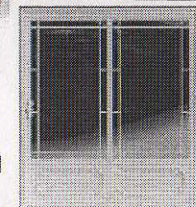
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