

Holocaust survivor describes 'phases of hell'

BY SHELDON ALBERTS

WASHINGTON - In the 62 years since Susan Taube was liberated from a Nazi extermination camp, the horrible details of the Holocaust sometimes dissolve into a jumbled blur of unbearable memories.

But if there's one thing the 81-year-old survivor will always remember, it is the ease with which the Nazis killed. Whether it was shooting an elderly woman for becoming too ill to sweep sidewalks in the Jewish ghetto, or shipping thousands to die in a gas chamber, the Nazis murdered with a casual indifference to their victims' humanity.

"People were killed for no reason," Ms. Taube told a group of 250 Canadian students who were visiting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington yesterday. "They just took the gun, and you were shot."

Ms. Taube's harrowing account of a childhood spent living through "different phases of hell" in Hitler's Europe prompted an emotional response from her teenage audience, in Washington as part of the Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program.

Many of the students, deeply moved after touring the museum exhibits, crowded around Ms. Taube for hugs and expressions of gratitude.

"It's really important to meet people like her, because we are the last generation who will get to hear the stories of Holocaust survivors first-hand," said 15-year-old Meghan Plotnick, a Grade 10 student from Vincent Massey Secondary School in Windsor.

"It's up to us to carry on the message of the Holocaust to make sure it will never happen again."

For the young Canadians, Ms. Taube's speech capped 18 hours of intensive study designed to raise their awareness of the Holocaust and of the need to fight racism and religious intolerance in the 21st century.

"The message I take is that this should never be done again," said Alexander Paolozzi, a 17-year-old from Marshall McLuhan High School in Toronto.

In interviews after the event, Alexander and several other students drew parallels between the Holocaust and modern-day genocides in places like Rwanda and Darfur.

"The most important thing to take out of this experience is that education is the most powerful tool against hatred," said Lyndon Lyons, 15, also of Windsor's Vincent Massey school. "The only way to prevent another Holocaust is to educate people so they know the consequences of racism and stereotypes and discrimination."

Jennifer Cabral, a 17-year-old student from Marshall McLuhan, said she was shocked that world leaders have been so slow to take action in Darfur.

"After the experience of the Holocaust, you would think the world would be more aware of what's occurring," Jennifer said.

The Canadian teens spent several hours this week touring the Holocaust museum, which tells the story of six million victims through photographs, artifacts and personal effects.



DAVID S. HOLLOWAY, GETTY IMAGES

Holocaust survivor Susan Taube speaks to Canadian students attending the Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program event held in the Meterhoff Theatre at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., yesterday.