

Memorable Moments

AND MEMORABLE YEARS

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM

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*This book is dedicated to the Museum's volunteers
and in particular to the survivors, whose friendships are a blessing
and whose lives are an inspiration.*

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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

MEMORABLE MOMENTS AND MEMORABLE YEARS is a truly inspirational mosaic of stories from the Museum's volunteers, employees, interns, and visitors. We are pleased to dedicate it to you, our volunteers, whose devotion and service deeply enrich our institution.

With your help, we have welcomed nearly 30 million visitors to the Museum over the past 15 years. As you will see in these moving stories, encounters between the public and the Museum reflect our efforts to reach and transform as many people as possible. They show us how people learn not just from the institution, but from each of you as well.

So as you read this special book, cherish your many accomplishments and remember that there are many memorable moments and memorable years to come. I look forward to sharing them with you.

SARA J. BLOOMFIELD, MUSEUM DIRECTOR

SEPTEMBER 7, 2008

FOREWORD

Each of the Museum's volunteers, staff members, and interns has formed special friendships and enjoyed the camaraderie of working together, experiencing many memorable moments in their beloved Museum. They insist again and again that their work at the Museum was—and is—more than just a job. It is also devotion to a righteous cause.

The stories presented in the first edition of *MEMORABLE MOMENTS* were all written by volunteers as they strove to recount their unforgettable experiences at the Museum. Their words touched us, thrilled us, saddened us, and deeply changed us. For this, our second edition of *MEMORABLE MOMENTS*, published in honor of the Museum's 15th anniversary, we invited staff, interns, and visitors to share their experiences too. Was there a moment, an event, an accident of fate that captured why it is they work here or why they came to visit? Was there something new they learned that they thought others could learn from too? Were they different people when they left than when they came? Did their experiences change them and if so, how?

This book brings together their answers—their stories—and those of our volunteers too. We warmly welcome you, dear readers, to share in these, their most memorable moments and memorable years.

LARRY GARFINKEL, PAUL GARVER, LARRY FROMMER, AND ED WEINER
EDITORS





USHMM

MEMORABLE MOMENTS AND MEMORABLE YEARS

I made it slowly through the Permanent Exhibition. I found that most of the time I had my hand over my mouth or clutching my chest, but I didn't cry until I walked out. At that point, I lost it. There is a hall to the left coming out of the exhibition, which I went into—I guess to be alone. While I was standing there, one of your fantastic volunteers came and asked if I was alright. I couldn't stop crying and told her this was my first time to the Museum. She said she had been a volunteer for 12 years and many of the parts of the exhibition she still couldn't see. She took me by the hand to the ladies' room, sat me down, talked to me, and got me a cup of water. We talked about the injustice in the world, and then we talked and laughed about our grandsons.

I would bet that you have lots of volunteers at your Museum. I didn't tell you her name because I want to thank all your volunteers for the work they are doing. That simple act of kindness after seeing the horror of the Nazis will stay with me a long, long time. The lesson I learned is that if we are going to save the world, we need to reach out and care for each other. Thank you so much for being there.

JOAN STROH
MUSEUM VISITOR, OHIO

I have always been learning about the Holocaust but never experienced it like this. I thank you for the opportunity to have a mere glimpse of what went on. My heart, my mind, and my soul were touched and I will never forget the lessons learned or the people who suffered. I pray for the survivors and their families and hope that this museum continues to pay homage to all involved and create loving hearts for those of the same mind as Hitler around the world.

DEBBIE HARRIS
MUSEUM VISITOR, JAMAICA

UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM



THOMASARLEGE.COM

Today, I walked through the pages of my history book. I regret that I did not fully appreciate the human experiences and loss during the Holocaust before visiting the Museum. Listening to the voices of the survivors and looking at the family portraits made me realize how grateful I should be. I will definitely tell others of this experience today. I will love my mother, and appreciate more my daily bread.

SABRINA DELROD
MUSEUM VISITOR, OHIO

I was leading a tour of the Permanent Exhibition for a group of physically and emotionally disadvantaged adults who lived in group homes and, if able, worked menial jobs. Their chaperone explained that they had studied the Holocaust.

At the end of their visit, I told them that when they returned home they should tell everyone about their trip to the Museum and why they wanted to come. Tell them about what evil people did, I said, and what too many good people did nothing to prevent. I said, "Remember that you are worthy of a good life. You have value. You have special gifts. You have family and friends who love you and you have a government with laws to protect you. SO STAND UP AND BE COUNTED."

There was a moment of silence that seemed like an eternity. Suddenly, the group broke out in applause. With tears in my eyes, I led them downstairs to their waiting bus, where each one thanked me personally before getting on. A few weeks later I received a letter from the chaperone which said, "You were wonderful with them. You spoke to them as true adults." I am pleased to say the group revisited the Museum several times and I saw many improvements and achievements made by each one of them. Not only did they stand up and get counted, they stood up and soared.

MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

Walking through this house of memory has deeply shattered and saddened me like no museum before. I feel sadder and wiser, strengthened in my belief that it is vital to keep these memories alive, to never let anything like this happen again. Walking this path may have taught me more than years of German history lessons. I will recommend this experience to any German school kid or friend of mine, as well as to anyone of any race, or creed, or country of this earth. And I will remember.

MAIKUS WIERSCHE
MUSEUM VISITOR, GERMANY

I was working as a volunteer at the Donor Desk, which caters largely to those who want to become members of the Museum, renew existing memberships, or make significant donations to the Museum. So it was a surprise when an eighth-grader and her girlfriends came over and sat down. Without asking any questions, the young girl immediately indicated that she wanted to make a donation. She reached into her pocket, pulled out \$25, and gave it to me. Somewhat stunned, I said to her that that was a lot of money. “Are you certain you want to give all of it?” I asked. She said she did.

Her friend reminded her that she wouldn’t have any money for lunch or dinner. “I don’t care,” the girl replied. “It’s more important that I donate the money to the Museum.”

I took the money, and this little girl of only 13 became one of the Museum’s youngest members. Her friend, touched by this generosity, offered to treat her to dinner, and my desk partner gave her \$5 from her own pocket so that this young donor could buy lunch.

Donations to the Museum wrapped in small packages can be as generous and inspiring as those that come in large parcels.

MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

Words cannot explain nor describe what is held within these walls. May we never forget or let our children forget that evil does exist and there are people willing to stand up for what is right.

SALINA VICTORIA AND FRANK HERNANDEZ
MUSEUM VISITORS, OREGON AND HAWAII

The Holocaust Museum creates a memory that every person should experience. The horrors that every victim faced should shape our lives and allow us to realize how truly blessed we are to love the lives we have been given.

B.K.
MUSEUM VISITOR, PENNSYLVANIA

My experience here has been life-changing. I am only 21 years old and it has given me a sense of hope for the future. I want to act on my feelings of injustice! Especially for Darfur, I am motivated to act and not just stand by and hope that someone else will do something. This museum is one of the most amazing eye-, mind-, and soul-opening things I’ve ever encountered. I feel like I have been awakened. Thank you.

MUSEUM VISITOR

As a young American soldier in 1968, I visited Dachau and was shocked and horrified by what I saw in that otherwise beautiful Germany. Never was a contrast so stark. You have managed to preserve not just the horror but also the hope of all people that nothing like this should ever happen again. Thank you!

MUSEUM VISITOR

I came here once again, this time with my mother so she too could see the brutality some seek to deny. Just bring one more person each time you come back.

M. SALGADO
MUSEUM VISITOR, PUERTO RICO

I came here to honor my dear friend, Doris Fedrid, a Polish Jew who survived the ghetto and the camps and eventually made the trip to America. Her husband survived a death camp. He was deaf. She is deaf and blind. I hear—through her hands—stories of struggles to stay alive and the will to live. She is a strong woman and I am lucky to know her!

MICHELLE PERREIRA
MUSEUM VISITOR

It was the Wednesday before Yom Kippur 2007 and I was volunteering at the Information Desk. A very dignified woman approached me timidly and I asked her whether I might be able to help her. She said that she had heard that the Museum was looking for firsthand accounts of survivors who had been onboard illegal ships arriving in Palestine after the war. She said that she had been on one of these ships and had photos as well as memories.

We started talking and she told me that she was here from San Francisco visiting her daughter for the Jewish holidays and would only be in the Museum for the afternoon. I was most certain that this was someone who should talk to a senior staff member and I told her that I would find someone. After calling Ellen Blalock of Survivor Affairs, I listened as this woman told me part of her very emotional personal history.

She explained that she was from Bratislava and had been in the Budapest ghetto as a child. Her parents had been separated from her and taken to Auschwitz, where they perished. She was just 13 years old when she made her way from Budapest to France and was put aboard an illegal ship, the third after the *Exodus* to reach Palestine. She recalled that though there were 1,200 people onboard when the ship sailed, only 900 reached Palestine. She still remembered how those who died en route were slid down planks into the sea for burial. Those who survived were fortunate to be permitted to disembark in Palestine, whereupon this woman was interned for two months in a refugee camp. She remained in Palestine (later Israel), married another survivor, and eventually immigrated to the United States in 1960.

We stopped speaking when Ellen arrived to take her up to the Survivors Registry. I thanked her for sharing her story with me and told her what a privilege it was for me to meet her. After several hours, she stopped back and thanked me for helping her find the right person at the Museum. I later learned that she had been able to see her father's Auschwitz prisoner records for the first time that day and was completely overcome with emotion and gratitude for her experience at the Museum.

This was a small event in an ordinary day at the Museum but one that I shall long remember. I shall cherish her willingness to share this personal account with me as I cherish each of the unique and heart-wrenching ones shared with me by the Museum's survivor volunteers, whom I feel honored to call my friends.

FLORENCE D. BANK
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

As an elementary school teacher, I realize now, more than ever before, how important it is to teach our children tolerance, respect, and acceptance of those who may be different than we are. Thank you for sharing all of this information.

DENA BLANKENSHIP
MUSEUM VISITOR, CALIFORNIA



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I was asked to arrange a visit to the Museum for the Young Marines of Detachment 1049 from Anne Arundel, Maryland. The group consisted of boys age 8 to 15, along with their parents and, in some cases, their sisters and brothers. There were 66 people in all. Not knowing any of them personally, I just expected to give them a short tour and answer any questions that I could, but the tour ended up lasting almost four and a half hours.

Well, now for the good part. George Martin, the leader of the Young Marines, had a 12-year-old boy in the group who admired Adolf Hitler. Apparently he had posters and symbols all over his room at home, despite the efforts of his mother to tell him how wrong Hitler was. During the Museum tour, the young boy asked me many questions and when we reached the concentration camp bunks, he began asking even more. Then, in the section on liberation, he read all about the good things people did to help others, and still he wanted to know more. I told him about the research the Museum has done on the Holocaust and all the survivor testimony we've collected, and then I took him to the Wexner Learning Center, where he sat down and listened to recordings from the Nuremberg Trials.

At the end of the day he told George Martin and his mother that when he got home he was going to throw away all of his Adolf Hitler items and then he was going to tell his friends that they were all wrong, give them the Museum brochures he received, and tell them to come to the Museum. My tour was well-received and the Young Marines have asked me to lead another one. I said yes, especially since that young boy had a such a life-changing experience at the Museum.

JAMES BRADY
DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT

Very moving still after four visits. Our greatest challenge in life is overcoming hatred.

SARAH WILDER
MUSEUM VISITOR, FLORIDA

Hate and intolerance divided Ireland for many years. This exhibition is important in showing what can happen when hate goes unchecked.

MUSEUM VISITOR, IRELAND

Awesome, powerful, but enlightening in a way that will change me forever. May each of us commit to remembering the atrocities of the past so they never become a part of the future.

DELIHIA MCINTIRE
MUSEUM VISITOR, DELAWARE

During the first week we opened, the preview week, I was working in Visitor Services and was walking on the third floor of the Museum. I came to the picture of the tattooed arms and saw a man who was visibly upset. When I asked him what was wrong, he said to me, “I want to take a picture, but I was told I could not use a flash.” I asked him what he wished to take a picture of, and he pointed to one of the arms on the middle-left side and said to me, “That’s my arm.” I told him that I would be glad to help him and then I took a picture of him, even with the flash, as a gift to this very special survivor.

CHRISTINE SONNABEND
PROJECT MANAGER, INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

She was a child when the horror began. She watched her family and friends being routed from their homes. She experienced hunger, fear, and deprivation. She witnessed unspeakable brutality, senseless cruelty, and murder. She felt alone in a world of violence and terror.

Hers is a story we have all heard too many times from Holocaust survivors. But she is not a survivor of the Shoah more than 60 years ago. She is Clemantine Wamariya, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide, which occurred a half century after the horrific events of the Holocaust.

Clemantine was a lucky child—she survived and came to Wilmette, Illinois, to live with a wonderful family. Today she is a high school senior at New Trier High School. In 2006 she shared her story with more than 3,000 guests at the Museum’s annual Risa K. Lambert Luncheon in Chicago. This young woman bridged the gap of a half century as she described the impact of reading Elie Wiesel’s *Night* as an eighth-grade student. Clemantine said the experience changed her life. “Not only did it help me come to terms with my own personal history of surviving genocide in Rwanda, but it paved the path for my future,” she said. “It was my time to tell my story.”

Clemantine Wamariya is playing an important role in the Museum’s continuing efforts to the teach others about genocide, speaking at the opening of a Museum exhibition on the crisis in Darfur and at the 2007 Days of Remembrance events. On the Museum’s 15th anniversary, this young woman proudly carries the torch of education and remembrance.

JILL WEINBERG
DIRECTOR OF THE MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE

This museum helps place things back in perspective, what’s really important, what matters. How many times we are concerned about silly things, or because we don’t have this or that. We have to thank God for everything we have and how blessed we are because our family is together.

L. CORONADO AND FAMILY
MUSEUM VISITORS

I am moved deeply. We must never forget what oppression and tyranny look like, and guard against them at all costs.

SUSAN BARTON
MUSEUM VISITOR, FLORIDA

I am learning about the Holocaust more in-depth than what we're being taught in my History of the Holocaust class. Just hearing about the Holocaust in class and watching videos is nothing compared to this museum. Thank you for providing this to the world.

NATASHA
MUSEUM VISITOR

This is an unbelievable outrage that has occurred to humankind. May we pray and hope through our leaders that this atrocity may never be seen again. May all who enter these walls be changed forever and go out into the world a better person to spread love and see everyone as equal here on earth.

ANTHONY AND REBECCA LAREZ
MUSEUM VISITORS, TEXAS

This memorial museum is very heartfelt. I've always wanted to come here. I think the thing that had the most impact on me was the railroad car, and to realize that I was in there where many victims had been before. The lighting of the candle had a big impact on me as well. Thank you—I know you all probably hear that a lot, but for me, being a teenager, the Museum helps me see things in a different light.

ERIN GRACE PENLEY
MUSEUM VISITOR, VIRGINIA

I was at the Information Desk the first week the Museum opened when an elderly woman approached me and said, "I just want you to know that I am a Holocaust survivor and I just had a wonderful time."

This comment left me speechless and, apparently, with a very puzzled look on my face. The survivor obviously noticed because she said to me, "You're probably wondering why I said that."

I nodded, and she continued: "For so many years I have felt like a forgotten person whom nobody cared about. Now I know that people care, and I am delighted."

LARRY GARFINKEL
PROJECT COORDINATOR, SURVIVORS REGISTRY

As an Israeli, it was very important for me to come here and see the Museum. As a grandchild of survivors, it was much more touching. I feel that this place has a good sense of remembering—and it meant a lot to light the candle for my family.

YAU ALON
MUSEUM VISITOR, ISRAEL

FOR THE DEAD AND THE LIVING WE MUST BEAR WITNESS



Don't you ever wish you could go to a lost-and-found booth and request long-lost relatives?

“What can we do for you today?” they would ask.

“Why, yes, I am looking for one of my relatives that we expect may have perished during the Holocaust,” I would say. “Did anyone, by chance, find him and drop him off with you?”

“What is his name?”

“I don't know his first name, but the last name is Culman.”

“Yes, please wait one moment while I go into the back and check.”

Ten minutes pass. Then: “Here you go, this is Ernest Culman.”

“Thank you.”

“Glad I could be of help to you. Have a nice day.”

And I would walk off into the sunset clutching a long-lost relative I hadn't known for sure I even had.

By the time I was a teenager I had learned not to ask my grandparents—my mother's parents—about relatives who may or may not have survived the Holocaust, since they would eventually tell me something, or nothing at all. Visits to them in Leeds, England, used to be excruciating and toward the end of their lives I could not bring myself to go. My grandmother was always in a bad mood and would try to make everyone else feel bad, too. I don't have one memory of her ever being positive. She would say things like “Do you want to see my number?” The average person would think she meant her telephone number, but then she would pull up her sleeve and you knew those were not the numbers you thought she had been referring to.

Once I arrived 20 minutes late to her house—20 minutes!—because I had to buy books for my summer reading list. She immediately interrogated me.

“You are late! You know what being late meant when I was your age?”

“No, Grandma.”

But I had an inkling of what it had meant: It meant disloyalty! It meant losing your entire family!

But I was only 15 years old. How could I have even comprehended what she was talking about? I was growing up in a different time, where the concern at home was not whether we would lose our citizenship, or be banned from the streets, or be forced into a ghetto. No! My worries were: Will I pass ninth grade? Will my parents finally complete their divorce? Blah, blah, blah. Why would I ever want to ask such a shell-shocked person about the past and if there were any other family survivors? As far as we knew, there were none. Or if there were, they could be just as psychologically traumatized as my grandmother, maybe even physically abusive.

Therefore the irony of working at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum ten years later on a summer fellowship during graduate school was not lost on me. Me, who grew up in Cologne, Germany, and who would cringe at the thought of the Holocaust, who would get depressed and be on the verge of crying every time my graduate course on genocide met because I had no family on my father’s side. Suddenly I was working at the Museum documenting the Holocaust and what had happened to families just like mine.

I was searching for a document on my second day of work when Michlean, a Museum archivist, suddenly pulled at my nametag. “Ah, a Culman!” she said, looking me up and down. “Are you related to the Culmans in the Washington, D.C., area?”

I had no idea what she was talking about. I thought this lady must have confused the spelling of my family name with someone else’s. We had no survivors on my father’s side! “I have no idea of what you are speaking,” I told her. “All my Culman relatives perished in the Holocaust.”

“Are you really that sure? Go home and ask your parents for relative names and prewar locations.”

The next day I returned to her with all the information she requested, thinking this would prove to her that there were no survivors on my father’s side except my grandfather and his sister, who passed away before I was born. I told her that my great-grandfather was named Gustav Culmann and lived in Katowice, Poland. An hour later she returned carrying a Post-It note with the names and phone number of an Ernest and Anja Culmann in Rockville, Maryland. “This is your grandfather’s first cousin,” Michlean said. “Give them a call—they can’t wait to meet you!”

Did I mention how much I cried?

HILLAH CULMAN
FORMER MUSEUM FELLOW

Thank you for the opportunity to sit and reflect on the enormity of the Nazi Holocaust against my people and my parents’ families. This was very significant for me after the overwhelming experience of the exhibition.

DAVID ZYNGIER
MUSEUM VISITOR, AUSTRALIA

You go through it all and question how man and God could let such harshness happen. You walk through memories of a past so real and so full of pain and suffering. You think of agony and torture. And yet it is just as striking that the humanity that survived, the faith and way of life that endured, and the will to live could carry much optimism and hope. All this happened in the past such that the present will always remember—and the future will never forget—to be human.

GEORGINA ANGSANTO
MUSEUM VISITOR, PHILIPPINES

I can barely grasp just how sick and twisted this entire situation was. I'm furious, not just at those who directly slaughtered millions but also at those who stood by and watched. How could someone calmly ignore the fact that so many were being brutalized and murdered and do nothing? How?

I sincerely thank everyone who worked to put this memorial together. People need to know that not just action causes harm; the omission of action causes it too. Although this was a heart-wrenching memorial, I'm so glad it was created. And to those who lost all in the Holocaust, I want to apologize. I'm sorry the world stopped looking and acting when it was most necessary.

SHAUNA
MUSEUM VISITOR, VIRGINIA

This museum has made me consider the times when I was selfish or inconsiderate. I will never forget what the Jews experienced. I thank you for giving me a better understanding of the Holocaust.

NICKI WYNN
MUSEUM VISITOR

I remember the days of the war—how my great aunts, parents, and grandparents talked about it and hoped I wouldn't hear or understand, but I did. This has been a very moving experience and I think of my great aunts and uncles whom I never met, whom I could not meet—they died in these camps. Thank you for showing this to all of us so that we may never forget.

MARTHA LITMAN ALBRECHT
MUSEUM VISITOR, ARIZONA

There is not a specific memorable moment that I can think back on, but the entire experience was extraordinarily rewarding. One can always learn something new about the Holocaust and it is amazing how many lessons can be taken from it. In my current line of work at an international non-profit, I encounter many cases of corrupt leaders and conflicts that hopefully will not reach the level of genocide such as that during the Holocaust. I keep all that I learned about ethnic hatred and the development of authoritarian regimes in the back of my mind daily. It is startling to me that people can be and have been historically so intolerant of others and I hope that I can take the insight I've gained from the Museum and apply it to current international affairs and conflict resolution.

GRETCHEN GUY
MUSEUM INTERN

The hardest part for me was the room with all of the shoes. Shoes define what a person does in everyday life. Shoes are leather, rubber, and other materials that are with you every day. This museum has taught me way more than high school did.

KAITLYN
MUSEUM VISITOR, IOWA

This is my second time visiting the Museum, and I have been to Yad Vashem in Israel twice also. Each time I visit here, the information is just as disturbing yet moving as the time before. I hope the world speaks up for what is occurring in Darfur, Sudan, right now because *never again* must mean *never again*.

DANNY HEIN
MUSEUM VISITOR, ILLINOIS



It is disturbing to think that human beings could do something so horrific to other human beings out of fear and ignorance. It is even more disturbing to know that still more human beings suffer the same fate from fear and ignorance today. Is it going to take yet another museum to tell the story and leave our souls sad and torn apart before we start doing something to stop all of this?

We are all human beings on this one earth and we are all connected—what affects one affects another and we are capable of peace, love, and understanding. It's way past time to take the first step as a united planet. Thank you for continuing to tell the story of the Holocaust and helping bring more people into the light.

JANE BEATTIE
MUSEUM VISITOR, NEW ZEALAND

When I was training to become a volunteer guide, we were given a tour of the Permanent Exhibition. Our guide read us a letter that was found in the milk can from the Warsaw ghetto. I have to admit that I wept. The words of the 19-year-old author of the letter were so brave, so noble, and so eloquent. It once again brought home, in a very personal way, what was lost. He who saves a life saves the world entire. Did those who took that life and the lives of so many doom the world entire?

I must admit I almost quit the program after the reading of that letter. I thought I wouldn't be able to handle the sadness of it. However, I stayed, and I have been very gratified by the reactions of people young and old to our presentations.

CAROL KNOLL
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

The Museum received an e-mail addressed to me from a Polish journalist planning to write about Jewish life in my hometown of Sosnowitz, which in 1939 had nearly 13,000 inhabitants, 10,000 of whom were Jews, and which today is devoid of any Jews at all. I assume that he was searching the Museum's Web site for people from that small town and came across an article about me and the tiny gold ring I managed to hold on to through all the camps I was deported to. (I wore it on my toe, tied around with a piece of rag.) After reading my story, he wanted to tell me another story involving a small ring.

It seems that several of the Jewish families from Sosnowitz had immigrated to Israel and now Sosnowitz's mayor had invited them to return for a visit. They came and erected a memorial and brought with them an Israeli singer to perform at the dedication ceremony. As the singer was leaving town, a Pole approached her and handed her a silver ring. The Pole explained that he had found this ring while renovating his house, which had once belonged to a Jewish family. He had kept the ring all these years in the hope that he could one day give it to a Jewish woman to wear. He handed the Israeli singer the ring and walked away.

To me this was a memorable moment because, despite the despair of what had happened to my hometown, a decent human being—this thoughtful Polish man—had emerged.

MANYA FRIEDMAN
SURVIVOR VOLUNTEER

Genocide is still occurring today. Hundreds of thousands of children in Africa and undeveloped parts of the world are living *Daniel's Story*. Remember Daniel, remember Rwanda, remember Darfur! Let's learn to love each other and let's stand up for injustice across cultures, across nations, across time.

JIMISHA R. HOWARD
MUSEUM VISITOR

It was the Fourth of July and the Museum was alive with visitors. I was the only volunteer on duty that morning, and as I briefed visitors entering the elevator to the Permanent Exhibition, I was approached by a group of 20 Israeli and 2 American visitors. At that point, I made a decision. Though I realized that the Americans probably wouldn't understand Hebrew, to make it an intercultural experience I mixed Hebrew with English in my presentation. This raised some eyebrows but also purchased many smiles. It suddenly occurred to me that the Americans and the Israelis shared a special affinity, no matter the language. These were citizens of two different countries who had fought for and gained the gift of freedom and were joined together here in the Museum on a day that resounded with the word INDEPENDENCE.

JEREMY MENDELSON
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

Recently I was in the Hall of Witness when I noticed a middle-aged man at the Information Desk and asked him if he needed assistance. Upon hearing my accent, he inquired where I was from. I told him Poland and he told me he was from Belgium. He then asked me what city in Poland I was from and I told him Sosnowitz. He said he had family in Sosnowitz and that he would like to find out about them.

I took him to the Survivors Registry and introduced him to Steven Vitto. As Steven gave him the names of the relatives he was looking for, I realized that two of his cousins were with me in a labor camp in Germany. One of them was named Salka and had lived in my neighborhood in Sosnowitz, and the other was named Sala and had been visiting Sosnowitz when Germany invaded Poland and she was prevented from returning home to Belgium. I knew them well because we all worked together on the same shift in camp. Like me, they both survived the war. What a coincidence! It brought back many memories for me.

MANYA FRIEDMAN

During the war, my mom's family (her mom, dad, brother, and sister) hid a Jewish mother and son in their attic. After the war, this mother and son immigrated to the United States and now live in California. Although my mother was young, she remembers this vividly and she remembers being so close to starvation that they dug up tulip bulbs to boil and eat. I was brought up with vivid stories from my parents and grandparents. These stories should be passed down from generation to generation.

MARILYN ZUCKERMAN
MUSEUM VISITOR, NETHERLANDS

I am a founding volunteer and over the years I have experienced many wonderful moments at the Museum. Not only have I found my work rewarding, but I have been heartened to see my children with their Museum badges when they were volunteers completing their high-school community service work at the Museum. It was very meaningful to me, and I know it is important to the survivors to see children and grandchildren take an interest in carrying on the legacy of the Holocaust.

One moment that sticks in my mind involved my daughter and several of the survivor volunteers with whom I work. We were all sitting around one afternoon when one of them suggested they have their picture taken with my daughter. The group of ladies all stood up and gathered around and before I knew it they were handing the camera to me. Rather than be insulted that I wasn't included, I was delighted by the bond that had formed between my child and her extended family, her surrogate grandmas from the Museum. It was a beautiful moment for me, and my daughter was smiling from ear to ear, so I know it meant a lot to her, too.

ESTHER TOPOREK FINDER
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

My great aunt survived Auschwitz, but she died before I was born. She had never spoken of her experiences to my family, perhaps because it was too painful. One evening, my mom (who is not Jewish) asked her about her tattoo, and she told the family her entire story. Although my mom felt ashamed to have asked, I wouldn't have heard the story had she not.

Thank you for sharing so many of these stories for my great aunt, as well as for those who did not survive.

LIZ KLEIN
MUSEUM VISITOR, OHIO

In 1996, four former ship passengers of the ill-fated *St. Louis* walked into the Museum's Survivors Registry seeking information about other passengers. In what would truly become a memorable moment, an adventure story began—one that would cover four continents and a ten-year archival search. With dedication and hard detective work, a team of Museum staff and volunteers did an amazing job—we succeeded in identifying all 937 passengers. We hope our research will not only affirm the individuality of these victims, but remind us all that the actions and inactions of governments and individuals have real consequences.

SARAH OGILVIE
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

I am greatly saddened by what mankind is capable of. I am also deeply grateful for the ability of the human spirit to rise up again and again.

MUSEUM VISITOR

On a lovely summer afternoon in August 2003, I joined hundreds of visitors at the Museum's Anne Frank exhibition, for which the Anne Frank House in the Netherlands had loaned the Museum some of Anne's most treasured possessions: her notebook, photos of her family and friends, and passages from her stories and fairy tales.

My tour of the exhibition was a "memorable moment" that provided me with a deep appreciation and understanding of the times in which Anne Frank lived and of her contribution to literature and to the memory of the Holocaust. Today, she and her family and friends, who hid in the "Annex" in Amsterdam for so many months with the help of Miep Gies and others, represent the authentic voice of the Holocaust. She was one of approximately 1.5 million children whom the Nazis and their collaborators killed only because they did not like Jews and some other religious and minority groups and decided to eliminate them! Anne's great and promising literary talent simply ceased the day she was taken from the Annex.

Seeing firsthand a facsimile of Anne's red- and white-checked diary in which she recorded her thoughts and experiences in the Annex, along with photos of her as a child in Germany and later as a preteen sitting at her desk in hiding, was a very moving experience. I left with the impression that Anne was a healthy, pretty, and intelligent child, and that in spite of the turmoil in which she was living, she was enjoying life and planning her future as a writer. Because her diary has been translated into several languages and sold all over the world, her legacy lives on.

RENETTA DEBLASE
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

Thank you for sharing these stories. May they lead us to action in Darfur.

MUSEUM VISITOR



I was standing between the Information Desk and the exhibition *Daniel's Story: Remember the Children* when an older woman in tears approached me, followed by her husband. I asked them if I could help. The woman revealed that she was a survivor and had just been through the Museum. For the first time since the Holocaust, she said, she was compelled to talk about her own experience. Her husband urged her to wait, but she insisted that she talk about it immediately.

Pulling her aside, I invited her to tell her story. When she finished, I escorted her to the Museum's Fifth Floor because I was certain that the staff of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies would want to hear her story. She had been in Bergen-Belsen and for several days stayed by the side of a prisoner who was dying of typhus. The prisoner's name, she said, was Anne Frank.

HARRIET HURWIT
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

My wife and I are evidence of survivors of Mauthausen and Auschwitz. Recently, at a wedding, my wife witnessed the two mothers-in-law reveling over the happy occasion. Someone noticed that they both had tattoos on their arms. When they were asked to compare the tattoos, they were both shocked and began crying. The tattoo numbers were one number apart. They were in the same line in the same camp.

RABBI DAVID AVIGDON
MUSEUM VISITOR, CONNECTICUT

I feel this is a very important part of history never to be forgotten. My family is from Denmark and my mother's family participated in the protection of the Jewish people. I am here today with my friend, who is also of Danish descent. She has a Jewish husband and lovely, talented children. I cannot imagine how my life would have been without knowing them.

MARIAN HUSTED
MUSEUM VISITOR, CANADA

As Jewish teenagers, we know about the Holocaust, but actually seeing it impacts us more than all the knowledge we have learned throughout the years. It opened our eyes and helped us understand the suffering of our ancestors. It made our knees weak. Thank you for this opportunity.

HANNAH SPIEGEL, AMANDA KAHN, AND EMILY SECKEL
MUSEUM VISITORS, CALIFORNIA, NEW JERSEY, AND PENNSYLVANIA

I will never forget the day when we first opened the Museum. I came in to speak to a group and I was a little early so I stopped at the Donor Desk. As I was standing there, a lady came over to ask a question. She was holding my mother's—Sara Galperin's—ID card. She said that the card mentioned that Sara Galperin had a daughter who survived and she wondered if anyone knew how she could find her. I took out my ID card, which has my maiden name—Nesse Galperin—on it. I said to the lady, "Oh, I have the daughter's card." She asked me how she could find Nesse Galperin. When I told her that I was Nesse, she hugged me and kissed me and cried. She thanked the Lord for bringing me to her.

NESSE GODIN
SURVIVOR VOLUNTEER

Thank you for keeping the memory of those lost in the Holocaust alive in our hearts and minds. It was one of the most horrific events this world has ever seen. As is often said, the greatest purpose of history is for humanity to learn from its past mistakes, so let us ensure that this is true. Thirteen years ago, there was Rwanda. Now there is Darfur. We have an obligation to raise awareness, beg our government officials, send money, and pray until the current brutality in Africa ends.

MUSEUM VISITOR

So much hate was demonstrated in ways I didn't even know existed. It's okay to cry when hearing, seeing, and feeling what these people went through. I say this because I cried myself. The feeling I get just by looking at these photos, the tears I cry hearing their voices cry for help—my heart is touched. This is an amazing museum. I shall return again with the rest of my family, and, if God permits, with my children and grandchildren. This will live forever.

DESIREE
MUSEUM VISITOR, TEXAS

I brought my wife and two stepsons to the Museum today. I thought it was important for my stepsons to see the realities of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, particularly since their great-great-grandparents were murdered by the Nazis at Babi Yar. In our high-tech world of iPods, Internet access at Starbucks, and shortening attention spans, it would be a tragedy for us to forget this time in history. It shows us so much of the human spirit—from the lowest forms of evil and savagery to the highest examples of selfless sacrifice, bravery, and honor.

MUSEUM VISITOR

About three years ago I was asked to address a group at the Museum of about a hundred young people, age 17–21, who were delegates to a convention of the Sigma Alpha Mu national Jewish fraternity. As an alumnus of the fraternity, I said to them, “Last night I pondered what to say to you today, you third-generation descendants from us Sigma Alpha Mu fraters of the late 1930s and early 1940s. How can I translate the meaning of this building, this Museum, so that you'll understand its full significance when you journey upstairs?”

You see, I told them, in the world of museums, ours is somewhat of an anomaly, a contradiction. First, whereas most museums portray great creativity in art, science, photography, music, and archaeology, this museum depicts the cruelty, the evil, the depravity of man. In any language it tells a horror story. But it is a story that has to be told, as a memorial to the millions who perished in the Holocaust. For them it is a tower of remembrance, an architectural kaddish, a visible sacrament to their martyrdom.

Second, in a symbolic sense, it is a lighthouse, radiating its beams to the conscience of the world that genocide against any race, nationality, or religion must never be repeated. And third, it serves to bridge the gap of years between the days of the Holocaust and today.

Perhaps, I told them, the words of the great philosopher and poet George Santayana sum up the full essence of this museum: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This museum indeed helps us remember the past, but it cannot do this alone. Soon many of the Holocaust survivors will no longer be with us, making it critical that younger generations keep the memories everlasting. If those who perished in the Holocaust are to be remembered, to be redeemed, I said, it will fall upon many in the days ahead to learn and share the history and lessons of the Holocaust.

Did my message cross the bridge of three generations? Only time will tell.

LARRY FROMMER
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

Recently I have been looking through years of keepsakes and tossing out most of them. One that I will keep is a program from the official groundbreaking for the Museum on October 15, 1985.

At the time I was a fourth-grade teacher at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland. I was excited to be asked to accompany a group of students representing our school to the ceremony. It was held in a huge tent at the site of the intended museum. It was during the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The program included the U.S. Army Band, which played “The Star Spangled Banner” at the beginning and “The Partisan’s Hymn” at the end of the ceremony. Reverend John Pawlikowski, a member of the Council, delivered the invocation and Rabbi Nathan Abramowitz of Tifereth Israel Congregation performed the benediction. The ceremony included remarks by Mark Talisman, Vice Chair of the Council; Donald Hodel, Secretary of the Interior; Thomas P. O’Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives; and Bob Dole, Majority Leader of the Senate. Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor, Nobel laureate, and Chair of the Council, delivered the main address.

It was all very impressive, but the most memorable part for me was the groundbreaking itself. Here soil from the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau, Theresienstadt, and Treblinka, and from the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery was intermingled and placed into the Museum’s foundation as the Army Band played “Ani Ma’amin” (“I Believe”). I can still feel a lump in my throat remembering that moment. If my immigrant parents were still alive they would have found it hard to believe.

When the ceremony was completed, the audience left. Back at school I pressed the student from my class who had gone to write a report on the events of the day. We sent it to a local paper and it was published on the children’s page. But the best part for Zachary Korman was the prize he received: an autographed copy of the book *Night*, sent to him by its author, Elie Wiesel.

Years later I retired from teaching and decided to volunteer at the Holocaust Museum for several reasons. My parents had emigrated from Hungary in the 1920s and brought over many of their family then and again in the 1930s. My father’s siblings continually thanked him for getting them out of Europe before it was too late since

nine children and their parents had made it. Not so for my mother’s family. In all, more than 40 members of our family were killed in Auschwitz and in Hungary.

After attending the groundbreaking, I felt moved to work at the Museum where I could help teach the history of the Holocaust to those who knew little about it and to the generations growing up. When I first started working here I found out that the head of the Volunteer Advisory Board was Iris Korman. Her husband was the son of Holocaust survivors, and her son Zachary was the fourth-grader in my class whose wonderful report was published in the newspaper.

There have been many memorable moments since I began to volunteer in 1993 but none more memorable than being at the groundbreaking ceremony.

EDITH KAUFMAN
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

I am so glad the effort was made to preserve the history of this tragedy. These lessons are essential for us and generations to come. Let us all put this knowledge and experience to good use, today and forever.

NATALIE
MUSEUM VISITOR

Tears did not come to my eyes until I saw the people who did what they believed necessary to protect the lives of their neighbors. It was not bravery that drove them, but a recognition of human responsibility. May we all be more like them.

MUSEUM VISITOR



TIMOTHY HURSLEY

I come from Guam, a site of Japanese atrocities in World War II. My grandmother died of starvation and dehydration four days after the Americans liberated Guam. There is not a single photo of hers that exists. She lives on in our memories. I've never seen her, but she lives in me. I understand.

CARLOTTA LEON-GUERRO
MUSEUM VISITOR, GUAM

On my first day at the Museum as a fellow in the Visiting Scholars Program, I was given an orientation to the archives by Michlean Amir. When she finished her computer presentation and turned to ask if we had any questions, she accidentally brushed a couple of papers from her desk onto the floor. Trying to be polite and make a good first impression, I bent down to pick them up. It just so turned out that what had fallen off the top of her desk was none other than my curriculum vitae!

That is kind of funny, I thought to myself as I handed the papers back to her. She proceeded to look at my C.V. for a couple minutes and then asked me where I was from in Boston. Wondering why she cared, I told her I grew up in Brookline and then moved up to the North Shore. But she didn't seem satisfied with that answer and continued looking at my C.V. "Do you have roots in Rochester, New York?" she asked. There was a moment of silence before I told her yes, I did. Both my mother and father grew up in Rochester—my mother's family was born there, while my father's family settled there after escaping from Nazi-occupied Vienna. But when Michlean asked, I thought only of those in my mother's family who currently live in Rochester—my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins—and wondered if perhaps she knew one of my aunts.

The connection was much deeper than that. Michlean looked at my C.V. again, which lists my full name—Ilana Fritz Offenberger—in bold capital letters. When she looked up, her eyes were glossy with tears. "Fritz Offenberger... your grandfather," she said. "He was a physician, right?"

My eyes welled up with tears too. For years I had been searching for someone who knew my grandfather Fritz, whom I was named after and who passed away when I was only two years old. I nodded my head yes, and then Michlean said, “Your grandparents are responsible for bringing my family to the United States!”

Apparently the story goes that Michlean’s mother and my grandfather knew each other in prewar Vienna. After the takeover of Austria, Michlean’s mother fled in one direction and my grandfather, after being released from Dachau and Buchenwald, fled in another. Luckily, both managed to survive the war.

ILANA OFFENBERGER
FORMER MUSEUM FELLOW

In the midst of a world full of uniqueness, we are individuals crying out to be part of something bigger and holier and deeper than we could be alone. The willingness to go through the Museum and bear witness to so much pain and devastation shows how the true inherent good that lies in all people lives on. When we seek to become one united strength, we must first begin by finding our greatest good and highlighting it so others can see it and join our cause. Then we will be a people united for the common goal of peace and divine love for all humanity.

MUSEUM VISITOR

I always have in the back of my mind my mother’s telling me about the Holocaust. Most of my family died during those years. My parents are now dead, I never knew any of my grandparents, and just one aunt remains in Israel after surviving Auschwitz. I cried thinking of all of my family, of the unknown who could have been my relatives or just friends. Thank you for this memorial.

ZEISLER PIERRE
MUSEUM VISITOR, FRANCE

Working as a volunteer at the Museum, I had not one but four memorable moments within an hour and a half. While posted at the elevators, I asked a couple where they lived and they told me in Owensboro, Kentucky, on the outskirts of Camp Breckenridge—where, as a member of the 9th Infantry, I was stationed in World War II. Talking with them revived many wartime memories for me.

A few moments later, I saw a visitor fumbling through the I.D. booklets, uncertain about which to choose. I randomly picked one out. Defying the odds, the one I chose was that of Charlene Schiff, my wife, a Holocaust survivor.

When I asked another visitor where she was from, I learned she lived in Rhode Island. She then noticed my last name on my badge and told me she had a good friend named Dr. Stephen Schiff in Rhode Island for whom she once worked as a nurse. I told her that was my son.

At the Information Desk, a woman asked me for a pencil and paper in order to jot down the address of someone in Arkansas. I explained that my wife was going to speak in Pocahontas, Arkansas. With that, she let out a shriek and told me that she lived in Pocahontas and would try to change her schedule so that she could attend Charlene’s presentation.

ED SCHIFF
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

I am an American Jew, and this memorial museum means so much to me. My relatives are Holocaust survivors, and to have a place where people can hear their stories and learn what happened means so much. God bless all those who have come here, and may our prayers be with those who cannot be here.

RACHEL M. UNGE
MUSEUM VISITOR

I came today expecting to cry and sob over a history long before my time. However, I stood in silence and reflection over a reality that unfortunately still exists within the world. I hurt for those innocent souls that had to bear the pain of human hatred and I mourn for them. But I also pray in hope of change. May love always conquer all.

LISSETTE VELAZQUEZ
MUSEUM VISITOR, NEW YORK

Time and again, we forget the lessons of the past. This is a touching, moving, and emotional experience. Everyone should come and take lessons of tolerance, respect, and humanity away with them. May we never forget the past and finally step forward when people are victims of injustice, torture, imprisonment, murder, or any form of inhumanity.

MUSEUM VISITOR

I have been to Auschwitz, and I always thought that nothing could compare. Auschwitz left an indelible impression in my heart. I still remember how it smelled of rotting wood and dirt. But the Museum does an incredibly good job of capturing every emotion I felt at Auschwitz. Standing in the barracks and box car sent me back to my own experience of standing in the barracks at Auschwitz. God bless every soul who died and peace be upon those who survived and are alive today—may we learn from this tragedy.

M. MEYER
MUSEUM VISITOR, SOUTH CAROLINA



I had the privilege and honor to present a tour of the Lodz ghetto exhibition in the company of two Lodz ghetto survivors and one of their daughters. Dr. Anatol T. Chari and Halina Grilich (I think this is how she spelled her name—her handwriting was very hard to decipher) were both children in the Lodz ghetto. They immediately recognized the picture of Wanda Rein on her bicycle and told me that they had just recently seen her in Israel and she had not changed at all. Both of them remembered Dawid Sierakowiak. They repeated several times that if he had been one year older he would have survived. He would have graduated with Dr. Chari and Halina, and everyone who graduated that year was granted special privileges which ended up saving their lives. Dr. Chari said that it was only after reading Dawid's diary that he realized how horrible life was for others.

When they saw the map of the city, both of them remembered the original name of Adolf Hitler Strasse and many of the other streets that were renamed by the Nazis. Dr. Chari said he actually used to live on Adolf Hitler Strasse before he was forced to move into the ghetto. Both he and Halina recalled the many addresses they lived at in the ghetto. When they came across film footage of winter in the ghetto, they stood and watched at least three times over. They could not remember any film being shot so to see this and all the familiar places in it really took them back. They said it was cold and miserable in the winter. Halina told how she would go get water so that she could wash her clothing. Dr. Chari couldn't remember taking a bath the whole time he was there.

When they reached the school section of the exhibition they recognized a few of the boys who had just graduated in the picture with Rumkowski. When they saw the album, Halina clearly remembered what her school's page looked like, but unfortunately it was not on display that day. She also clearly remembered signing her name in the album.

I found it interesting that they could not relate that well to the section on working. It had something to do with their being in the graduating class that for some reason (they did not tell me why) received special privileges.

After I let my tour group go off to finish the exhibition on their own, Dr. Chari pulled me over to the deportation poster. He told me that if you knew how to read it right at the time, you would have understood that leaving meant

something bad was going to happen. He then pointed to the people who were exempt from leaving and said that if all those very important people were allowed to stay behind, it was a sure sign of bad things to come for those who were made to leave.

Before Dr. Chari and Halina left, they thanked me for allowing them to come on the tour, and I thanked them for sharing what they did. They told me that I was doing a wonderful job and the stories I told were very appropriate. Hearing them say that was the best compliment that I have ever received.

The other people on the tour enjoyed their presence as well. Dr. Chari would go up to people in the group and share with them a random fact or elaborate more on something I had said. In the end, the other participants on the tour were very pleased and left with a memory from the Museum that was unique.

KIRSTEN PELTON
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

I came here today after reading much about the Holocaust. I was prepared. But still, after seeing this, I cry. Would I be able to survive, to take refuge, to give refuge? I have no idea and I hope I never have to find out.

SAM ROBBINVILLE
MUSEUM VISITOR, NEW JERSEY

This touching experience has inspired me that I could be the one person that could change a situation.

MUSEUM VISITOR

I am 57 years old, and I was really moved by the Holocaust Memorial Museum. I am not a Jew, but as an African American, my background has some similarity. I will always remember the race chart, the eye and feature charts, of what is a Jew and what is another race according to the Nazis.

MUSEUM VISITOR

The Holocaust isn't a Jewish issue, but a human race issue. I say this out of deep concern for the situation of the world today. Each and every one of us holds the responsibility for the existence of the entire human race by eradicating violence and hatred—first within oneself. Only then can we look around and comment on other people's deeds.

YANIV
MUSEUM VISITOR, ISRAEL

My grandfather liberated the concentration camps in Germany; he passed away in August 2001. I now have a much greater respect for the greatest man I ever knew.

ALEXANDRIA WHITE
MUSEUM VISITOR, OKLAHOMA

Visiting the Museum is the greatest experience that I have had in my whole life! This will help me see the world from another's perspective and allow me to build myself into a good man and a warrior of peace.

MUSEUM VISITOR

There have been certain moments that stand out in my mind as reminders of just how important—how noble—it is to be a police officer.

One of those moments occurred just a few weeks after I became chief. It came during a visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. To see up close—in such a vivid and powerful way—the atrocities of Nazi Germany, the suspension of basic human and civil rights, and the manner in which the madness of that time developed so rapidly and became so commonplace—it really got me thinking all over again about the role that we, as police officers, play in a free and democratic society. It was also during that visit that I decided all future recruit classes would spend a day at the Holocaust Museum as part of the regular recruit curriculum.

This is an excerpt from a speech Charles Ramsey, D.C.'s former Chief of Metropolitan Police, delivered at a recruit graduation ceremony in 1999. Since then, more than 32,000 officers have participated in law enforcement training at the Museum, including those from 12 local agencies as well as every new F.B.I. agent. It all started with Chief Ramsey's visit. Today the Museum also has programs for the military, legal, and medical professions as well as the government—all of whom are central to the health of our democracy.

LYNN WILLIAMS
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

I very much appreciate the goals and aspirations of this museum. Few things are more important than educating people about these atrocities. However, even educated visitors can benefit from this experience. It is, without a doubt, the most moving of my life, especially because I had family members and a rabbi experience the Holocaust firsthand. Thank you for your dedication and do not ever stop.

MICHAEL REISFELD
MUSEUM VISITOR, CONNECTICUT



After doing some research in the Museum's library recently, I came down to the Hall of Witness and went over to talk to Helen Goldkind and Sheila Bernard, who were sitting at the desk there. After a few minutes two young soldiers in uniform walked by and Helen and Sheila motioned to them to come over. They told us that they both had served three tours in Iraq and were now at Walter Reed for medical treatment. Though their wounds were not visible, one had a spinal injury and the other a brain injury that had resulted in short-term memory loss and nightmares. They were stationed with the 101st Airborne at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, and had come on their own accord to the Museum.

They were both extremely moved by what they had seen in the Permanent Exhibition and I know they felt privileged to be talking to two actual survivors. Then, when Helen and Sheila told them how much American soldiers, the liberators of the camps, meant and continue to mean to survivors, these young men were overwhelmed. I was thinking to myself that given all the negativity expressed about the Iraq war, these words of gratitude and blessing must be a great gift to these brave young men. They all gave each other hugs, which these young men surely needed considering what they have gone through.

Sometime later, I saw them again and I told them that the survivors I interview all say the same grateful words about American soldiers. As we walked out of the Museum, that's when I got my hug.

GAIL SCHWARTZ
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

This is why I fight!

STAFF SERGEANT GUADALUPE MARTINEZ
MUSEUM VISITOR, KENTUCKY

There is no way to describe what you feel when you walk through this museum. Your state of mind, how you carry yourself, everything people have come to know as you—it all gets rewritten.

ALLISON
MUSEUM VISITOR, OHIO

My father could not tell my sons about what he saw at the liberation of Dachau. This museum stands as his voice. Thank you.

SUSAN BERRY FLAUERFIELD
MUSEUM VISITOR

When I guide law enforcement officers through the Permanent Exhibition, it usually takes two and a half hours. On many occasions, the officers want to linger, read the panels, study the artifacts, or listen and watch the audio-visual materials. When this happens, I usually tell them that they should come back on their own to study what they missed, or perhaps bring relatives and friends and share with them the information they have learned on my tour.

One summer, when I was with a group on the third floor in front of the gas chamber, a gentleman who looked familiar interrupted and asked if I remembered him. For just a second, I couldn't place him. He was kind enough to remind me that he was an officer and had been on my tour the previous week. He had returned to lead his friends through the Museum. For a while I watched him taking over my role with his friends, and it pleased me so much to see him so excited about what he was doing.

SUSAN WARSINGER
SURVIVOR VOLUNTEER

The long-awaited day had finally arrived. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was opening to the world. I had arrived early for the dedication with a volunteer assignment of stewarding guests and dignitaries to their seats through a ring of tight security.

I stayed through the long but inspiring ceremony and wanted to remain to help keep control of the crowds pouring into the Museum. But by then the cold was penetrating, and reluctantly I felt I needed to go home.

As I crossed 14th Street toward the Metro, the crowd in front of me suddenly began dispersing and a large man restraining a vicious-looking dog walked toward me. My mind flashed back to the photograph in the Permanent Exhibition of the storm trooper and the ferocious dog and for a moment I was transported to Berlin in 1933.

It was even more chilling when the stranger shouted directly in my face, "Out of my way, you people don't belong here! Go back to where you came from!" I don't remember whether it was fear, shock, or a gut reaction, but I refused to budge and said to the man, "No, not this time, not ever." And with that, the man walked around me, still screaming obscenities.

It took me a few minutes to regain my composure. Then suddenly it occurred to me that in some crazy, perverted way, the racist was partially right: No, I didn't belong here on the sidewalk walking away from the Museum. So I slowly turned around, walked back to the Museum, and spent the rest of the afternoon assisting survivors in a special lighting ceremony. And when it was all over, I once again headed toward the Metro, no longer fatigued, and the sun brightly came out...or so it seemed.

ED WEINER
MUSEUM VOLUNTEER

We must stand for what is right and stand against what is wrong and madness. This exhibition is a reminder that we must constantly be vigilant! We are only one, but one can change life!

ELLEN LITTLE
MUSEUM VISITOR, UTAH

During a particularly crowded day at the Museum, I crossed paths out of pure coincidence with a Holocaust survivor whose story had a unique twist: It was nearly identical to that of my grandfather, a Holocaust survivor from Vienna, Austria.

It should be remembered that staff rotate continuously every hour and are therefore in different places perhaps ten times a day, making coincidences such as this all the more remarkable and showing what a truly small world we live in.

I was on post on the fourth floor when a wheelchair-bound elderly man and his wife asked for directions. Hearing the man's accent, I asked where he was from and learned he was not only from the same city as my grandpa (Vienna), but he was also born the same year (1906), arrested by the Gestapo at the very same time (Kristallnacht, November 1938), and imprisoned in the same concentration camp (Dachau) during the exact same period (November 1938–February 1939), only a few blocks away from the barracks where my grandpa was imprisoned. He had also been active in Vienna's Jewish sports community, where my grandparents met in the early 1930s. Like my grandfather, this survivor had sent a postcard back from the camp, as was typical for new prisoners.

Speaking with this man, I was able to gain some much-wanted insight into my own grandfather's experience as a survivor. I was thankful to have just happened to be in the right place at the right moment to meet him.

THEODORE SHEALY
VISITOR SERVICES REPRESENTATIVE

This was our second visit—we will continue to come. Our children have been here with us. The next generation of our family will visit together in the future. School curriculums now include the Holocaust. The millions who died will forever be remembered. As a teacher of kindergarten, I have made tolerance and respect priorities in my classroom.

MUSEUM VISITOR

Survivor volunteer Fanny Aizenberg works Wednesdays in the Survivors Registry in the Learning Center. On May 24, 2007, several Vietnam veterans—some wounded, one in a wheelchair who had lost both legs—and their wives came by the Registry. They asked about the Holocaust: How many survivors are left? Is anyone still alive with a tattoo on their arm? I then introduced them to Fanny.

The group was so pleased to meet her. They all gathered in the Registry, calling those in their group who had moved on or who were not there at that moment to come, and they spoke with Fanny for nearly thirty minutes about her experiences during the Holocaust. I made several copies of Fanny's Survivors Registry record, and they all wanted her to autograph their copies, which she did. They took pictures of her, hugged her, and were so grateful to have had the opportunity to meet her and to express their solidarity with the Museum's mission. They said that this was the highlight of their visit. The veterans were in tears when they left. The vet in the wheelchair said that he was inspired by Fanny's story of survival and persistence. It was quite a spontaneous and moving event.

STEVEN VITTO
TECHNICAL INFORMATION SPECIALIST, SURVIVORS REGISTRY

In December 2003, I received a call from someone with the Claims Conference who asked me if I was still the curatorial contact for the Museum. They were going to place a note in their next mailing that mentioned that the Museum was still actively collecting new materials. I said yes and verified my contact information, and that was that. The next morning I came in to find 20 new e-mails from survivors and their family members—all with information about artifacts they wanted to share with us and possibly donate. Apparently, soon after I had spoken with them, the Claims Conference had sent out an e-mail to more than 9,000 people worldwide.

One of the donors who responded was a lovely couple from South Florida—Elisabeth and Maurits Munichman. Both were hidden as children in the Netherlands. When I went to meet with them in their home, Elisabeth had her family’s papers and photographs all spread out and organized on the dining-room table. She had the letters that her grandmother, aunts, and uncles from multiple camps in the Netherlands had sent to her mother while she and her mother were in hiding in Amsterdam. Together we went through each one, with Elisabeth telling me who wrote it and what his or her fate was and providing me with translations where needed. Throughout this whole time Maurits sat with us, patiently waiting his turn to share his family’s collection with me. Occasionally he would get up and go to the kitchen or into the other room.

As Elisabeth and I went through her materials and talked about her family, I repeatedly asked her, “But where were you and your mother? What was happening to you while all of this was going on around you?” She consistently replied, “This isn’t about me! It’s about my family! They perished in the camps! I was just a child in Amsterdam!”

Finally I got her to open up and talk about how she and her mother were moved around Amsterdam with help from the resistance. In fact, her mother eventually married the man who helped save them. She recalled the air raids and having to rush down to the basement or cellar during bombings. She said she always had her suitcase packed and ready to go. It was a small blue suitcase that they carried from place to place and always took with them during bombings. At this point in the conversation, Maurits got up again and said, “Excuse me, I’ll be right back.” We didn’t think anything of this. He went out to the garage and came back in carrying Elisabeth’s little blue suitcase.

Elisabeth was so surprised—she didn’t even know she still had the suitcase. Her husband explained that it had been out in the garage for years, that they had brought it down with them when they retired to Florida.

Later, while we were discussing his experiences, Maurits mentioned a lockbox that his father put all of his family’s papers in during the war. I jokingly asked if he had that in the garage as well, and sure enough he did.

Elisabeth and Maurits donated both the suitcase and the lockbox along with their family papers and photographs. I told them that when they are ready to clean out their garage, I expect to be invited!

KYRA SCHUSTER
ASSISTANT CURATOR

This experience has shown me the great struggles that others have endured throughout history. It makes me feel very fortunate for all the things I have, including my freedom. It makes me realize that if those who were persecuted could overcome it, then I can overcome the problems in my life. This world lacks peace and love, and although I am only one, change has to start somewhere. Thank you for the humbling experience.

KEITH DILLON
MUSEUM VISITOR, OHIO

I am 59 years old and a Jehovah’s Witness. Like the Jews, many Jehovah’s Witnesses were cruelly persecuted and executed during the Holocaust. It is mind-boggling that one man—Hitler—could incite such hatred. I cried at this museum thinking that people can be so cruel to others just because of skin color, religious differences, or ethnic backgrounds.

DWIGHT COX
MUSEUM VISITOR



While working as a volunteer in the Senior Historian's Division, I was called by Charles Kurt of Houston—formerly Karl Heinz Goldschmidt—who asked if I could locate two Austrian-born Jews whom he had befriended in the Brussels orphanage where he lived in 1939 after fleeing from the Nazis. Kurt had arrived in the United States in 1940 and for six decades believed that he was the only one of his Austrian teenaged friends who survived. I told him that it would not be easy to find out. I contacted the Austrian Documentation Archive and the Museum's Survivors Registry. As a last resort, the Registry's Bill Connelly suggested that it might be helpful if Kurt could recall the name of the orphanage. Kurt remembered it as Speyer.

With that, I examined the files of collections related to Speyer and discovered that Walter Reed (formerly Werner Rindsberg) also once lived in the Speyer Orphanage and years later had donated a photo collection to the Museum. Using the captions for the photographs, I actually found the names of the two boys Kurt was seeking.

Kurt called Walter immediately and they talked for hours. Excited, Kurt contacted me to tell me he had learned from Walter that his two orphanage friends had been evacuated to southern France shortly before the Germans overran Belgium. They were still living, one within 200 miles of him, and said that they would soon reunite.

What seemed doomed as a fruitless pursuit proved to be an amazing, moving experience. I just happened to be volunteering when Kurt called.

CHRISTIAN URL
RESEARCHER, SURVIVORS REGISTRY

I am named for a survivor, my great aunt. In her memory and spirit, I will teach my children and future grandchildren to embrace equality for all and integrity.

ROBIN WALKER ELLMAN
MUSEUM VISITOR

As I walked around the Museum, I could almost feel the pain of both the survivors and the dead. This Museum is an amazing way to depict what happened during the Holocaust and it makes you think about the things we don't know about: the people who were not recorded, the places destroyed, and the occurrences that were never talked about.

MUSEUM VISITOR

It really shocked me. It took me back into the past. I didn't realize that not only the Jews were persecuted, but also people like myself who were disabled. This really showed me how lucky I am to have lived today and in America. I wouldn't have even had a prayer if I lived back then.

KATIE BALL
MUSEUM VISITOR, NORTH CAROLINA

As a procrastinating teenager, I don't do museums. Well, unless I'm dragged into one, as is the case today. Now, they're going to have to drag me out of here if the rest of the exhibitions are as involving and moving. This was a lesson I couldn't ignore. For once.

MUSEUM VISITOR

I met a woman named Miracle in Rwanda. The townspeople gave her that name because she managed to survive the 1994 genocide there when only one in ten Tutsi in her town survived. The Hutu came with machetes and chopped her and threw her in the river, which would eventually carry more than 50,000 bodies into Lake Victoria. But she was alive, so she crawled into the woods to try and live on the land.

In quiet, she returned home. And when the Hutu neighbors came for her, she hid in a bureau with three doors. When her killers opened one door, she moved to the side to hide. They could not open all three doors at once, and so she moved from side to side until her attackers fled in frustration.

Miracle lived. She remarried. She raised one surviving child and had more. She sang in the church choir and started a business running a small shop next to a museum on genocide.

Every day, she remembers the miracle of life. I challenge us all to remember as well.

TAMARA
MUSEUM VISITOR, WASHINGTON

Shortly after we opened the Museum to the public, I met the architect, James Ingo Freed. During the preparations for one of our first programs, I had some time in the Hall of Remembrance to speak with him. Beyond the disease that had already crippled his body, he seemed uneasy or upset and I asked him if everything was alright. He explained that he saw the red granite floor of the room as symbolic of the blood of the victims and he thought it shouldn't be walked on.

Then he smiled and said that the "Ray of Hope" was still there. Having no knowledge of such a "ray," I asked him where it was. He explained that he hadn't wanted the building to be completely about death, and so he had "drawn a line" through the building to the sculpted feet of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial. If you follow the lighted tiles in the floor of the Hall of Witness west and across the Mall, you are on the "Ray of Hope."

DUANE BRANT
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST



I'm writing this for my brother-in-law who is now gone. He was an 82nd Airborne paratrooper who liberated a few concentration camps during the Holocaust. I'm sure that he would be very proud of this wonderful museum that keeps alive the memory of that time.

T.M.
MUSEUM VISITOR, NEW JERSEY

I originally came here on a field trip with my Holocaust class. Throughout this museum, I have had the recurring feeling of faintness from the incredible power it has had on me. I have known about the Holocaust for many years but not felt the emotional connectedness with the victims until now. This museum is one I shall remember forever.

CALVIN GORSUCH
MUSEUM VISITOR, SOUTH CAROLINA

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TIMOTHY HURSLEY