



“To Remember...and to Teach”

## Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

KEENE STATE COLLEGE ■ 229 MAIN STREET ■ KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE ■ [WWW.KEENE.EDU/CCHS](http://WWW.KEENE.EDU/CCHS)

### Words Matter

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” The chant is familiar, but its sentiment is misleading. Words matter. They shape the worlds we share with others. They can heal and unite; just as easily, they can wound and divide. We know this. Bruises heal. Cuts and sores heal. But words, especially those that wound, wound now and wound for years.

We all know of families that have never recovered from unloving words. Once spoken, those words can never be retracted. We know about children who as victims of wounding words have spent years in therapy as adults, or relationships severed by words as sharp as swords. Words matter. In sickness and in health, words bind us together or tear us apart.

Last April my colleague, Tom White, and I had the privilege of joining Holocaust survivors Kathy Preston and Stephan Lewy at the State House when Governor Maggie Hassan issued her proclamation designating April as Genocide Awareness Month for the state of New Hampshire. I mentioned then that our shared efforts in Holocaust and Genocide Studies were works of public and community health. In May, I was reminded of that dimension when I learned of antisemitic graffiti in a neighboring community and wrote an op-ed for an area paper declaring that how we tended the violations of our neighbors was an indicator of public and community health – just as the acts of violation were acts that threatened common safety, public welfare, and the bonds of respect that are the communal glue of the region. Those connections may not be immediately obvious, but they are no less important to unpack.

Each spring semester the Cohen Center, in partnership with Keene State’s Department of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, sponsors a student trip to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. We spend most of a Saturday in the museum. The permanent exhibition begins on the top floor



*The damaged lintel above a Torah ark from a synagogue in Nentershausen, Germany that was destroyed during Kristallnacht.*

with exhibits depicting life in Nazi Germany from 1933 to 1938. At a critical crossroads marking *Kristallnacht*, students encounter Torah scrolls that lie in a sealed glass case raised above ground to show proper respect for once-desecrated scrolls now on memorial display. They are watched over by a defaced lintel that distinguished a synagogue ark in Nenterhausen, Germany. The carved and painted words on its upper span were gouged out by a knife or bayonet during the November violence of 1938. Their wounded message: *know before whom you stand*, with their Hebrew words, *Da lifnei mi attah omeyd*, almost totally defaced. The lintel’s inscription now stands as a silent but powerful reminder that those who perpetrated this act, or who

stood by and allowed it to occur, did not honor or value the ones before whom they stood. Indeed, biblical tradition – Jewish and Christian – teaches that when one person stands before another human being, he or she stands before God, whose presence is reflected in the face of that other human being. Similar values of respect for our neighbors are reflected in secular ethical traditions.

The wounded words on that lintel were a sign of Nazi Germany’s endangered public health. And they marked the dangerous transition that occurred with the November night of broken glass in 1938. The signs painted on two homes in a nearby community last spring were indicators too, defacing the property of their targeted victims. Just as surely, the words we use in public forums during political campaigns and routine town meetings bind people together; they can also be wielded to deface and target others. They, too, are indicators. Our words matter.

Indeed, our words and actions – especially our public ones – shape what sociologist Helen Fein has identified as a “universe of moral obligation.” When fear of terrorism abroad or of violence at home poisons our rhetoric, targeting others, we place those we isolate outside our universe of moral obligation. When that happens, we need to pause and ask ourselves “Who are we?” and to stop the escalating violence of our words before they lead us to places we do not want to go and from which we cannot easily return.

Our words matter because they are signs of who we are and the life we share with others. Let us tend and use them with care.

*Hank Knight, Director*

# The Grubman Teaching Trunk

The Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Keene State College welcomes Michele Thomas, Cohen Fellow and retired teacher, as the new Docent for the Grubman Teaching Trunk. Michele will be actively promoting the trunk for use by teachers in middle school environments who wish to engage students in real world discussions around this most important work. She will work with teachers in providing support for effective use of the materials in the trunk as well as facilitate its journey between schools. The Grubman Teaching Trunk for Middle School is designed to honor the memory of Simon Grubman, a survivor of the Lodz ghetto and other Nazi camps. The Grubman family has been a longtime supporter of the Cohen Center's work. If you have questions about the trunk, please contact Michele at michele.thomas32@comcast.net.



*New Grubman Trunk docent, Cohen Fellow Michele Thomas.*

## 2015 Genocide Awareness Month Video Award winners

April is New Hampshire Genocide Awareness Month. Cities and towns throughout the state are urged by Governor Maggie Hassan and the New Hampshire Legislature to observe this month in an appropriate manner by educating the public about the evils of genocide and commemorating victims of genocide.

We are pleased to announce the following winners of the 2015 New Hampshire Genocide Awareness and Prevention video contest:

Grades 6-8

**Gold Key: Dominique Audrey and Bhargavi Nimoji:**  
"The Holocaust – Never Again"

**Silver Key: Rachel Wattimina:** "Genocide"

**Bronze Key: Isabella Connelly and Gabrielle Suileman:**  
"Genocide"

All three students are from Somersworth Middle School. Their teacher and project advisor, Jaqueline Hanlon (also our Echoes and Reflections curriculum presenter), will receive a cash prize for classroom supplies. Congratulations! We are very proud of you!

April 2016 Video Contest theme will be "Giving a Face to the Targets of Genocide". Information can be found on the Cohen Center's website.



## A Note from Kelly Christianson

Thank you for checking in; I am doing very well. I have been in country for about three weeks now and am currently living with a host family until December. Training here has proven to be quite time consuming (about 50 hours per week), as we are learning Kinyarwanda, going through safety and security topics, learning the new Rwandan curriculum (it emphasizes student-based learning and critical thinking skills), and getting settled with our host families. I have limited Internet access, but here is the link to my blog: [www.kellypcv27.blogspot.com](http://www.kellypcv27.blogspot.com). I am trying to update it every week. I will send another update when I get my site placement on Friday this week!

– Kelly

*Kelly with her host family*



## Upcoming Workshops

- March 22, 2016 | Echoes and Reflections | Sheryl Ochayon  
9-3 p.m. | Mountain View Room, Keene State College
- April 12 | The Memory Project | Roz Jacobs and Laurie Weisman  
9-3 p.m. | Bishop Brady High School, Concord, NH
- May 10, 2016 | Echoes and Reflections Advanced Training Workshop  
9-3 p.m. | Jacqueline Hanlon, CCHGS Fellow  
Career Technical Center  
Somersworth High School, 11 Memorial Drive, Somersworth, NH



# From the Center Out

We work in order to build peace and prevent mass atrocity by studying the past. The past informs us and shapes us, especially when we share the burden of studying it with others. In November of 2014, I was an observer at the Auschwitz Institute on Peace and Reconciliation's Raphael Lemkin Seminar on Genocide Prevention in Oswiecim, Poland. Encountering Auschwitz was an overwhelming experience. It was strange walking through the wire to classes in Block 12 and mind-numbing to stand alone one morning in Crematoria I. I remember being appalled by the size and organizational structure of the "moral universe" created by the perpetrators at Birkenau, where unregulated business worked with SS slave labor to put profit margin above human life. I recall retreating into myself and suppressing and fighting my subconscious emotional revolt with great difficulty. However, I also learned, or re-learned, that one cannot do this alone. It was when colleagues reached out to me and allowed me to share the burden that I was able to let go of the despair.

I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that there are people all across the world who want to know about war and genocide in Yugoslavia. It was nice and dreadful, at the same time, to listen about it during Vahidin's story. It was soothing to know that people understand what happened and how it affected all of us. With Vahidin's story people could feel all the atrocities, a little bit on personal level. . . . It brought back memories from the past that aren't very pleasant. Although my city wasn't directly struck in the war and I was pretty much safe, I remembered how conflict had evolved and how people died or had been taken to the camps. And that is never going to be easy. But the overall impression and mark would be that it was healing to listen to Vahidin's story because it made me feel closer to other people rather than alone in that experience.

**– Matija Čavar, Educator from Croatia and  
Cohen Center Fellow**

In June I released the final burden of the trip when I sat down with my dear friend Ann Weiss, a Holocaust scholar and daughter of a survivor, at our annual Association of Holocaust Organizations conference. Finally I could tell her that, when entering the so-called "Sauna" of Birkenau, I came upon her exhibit, "The Last Album." Her book, now this exhibit, of faces and names from photographs she rediscovered in a barrack in Auschwitz, was for me the moment that the camp became something personal. It was the moment when I crumbled and when, unknown to her, she helped me face, and literally put faces to, the horror of Auschwitz. And yet, it was her work and her friendship that brought me peace and healing. I had to wait until I saw her to share that with her in person. Being together makes a difference.

How fortunate am I that every other summer our residential institute adds more friends to the journey?

"Education is soul work," said one participant, "and I've felt my soul enlarge this week." Our presenters and participating educators were

extraordinary once again. Of the many moments during the week that were unforgettable and life-giving, I would like to highlight the impact of Vahidin Omanovic, a survivor of the Bosnian genocide and co-founder and co-director of Center for Peacebuilding. Matija, an educator from Croatia, put it this way:



Above: Auschwitz I, 70 years after liberation. Below: Ann Weiss's exhibit: "The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau." Photos by Tom White.



Vahidin is a Muslim and an imam (a Muslim religious leader). I had met him briefly before my trip to Poland, but it was at the Lemkin Seminar that I got to know him and to see him work with the diplomats and activists there. Afterward, I asked him to teach at our institute. Vahidin is a guide who challenges preconceptions. He is a professional trainer in nonviolent communication and conflict resolution. For years he believed that revenge would relieve him of his anger and heal the scars he carried from the war. However, he experienced a personal transformation while participating in interethnic dialogue and trauma healing sessions sponsored by Karuna Center for Peacebuilding, USA. He received a master's degree at the School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont, and found that reconciliation was the only way forward for his community and country. In 2011, the Threshold Foundation honored Vahidin with the Fifth International Bremen Peace Award, naming him the year's "Unknown Peace Worker." In 2014, Center for Peacebuilding won a Tomorrow's Peacebuilder peace

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Vahidin Omanovic

award given by Peace Direct, UK. In 2015 Vahidin was awarded the Cohen Center's Susan J. Herman Award for Leadership in Holocaust & Genocide Awareness.

Vahidin could have stayed in New England, but he chose to return home to raise his family and work to bring together disparate and antagonistic groups from his homeland. At the institute, Vahidin shared his story, conducted an exercise on the role of identity, and shared a roundtable discussion on "Where do we go from here?" with Holocaust survivor Kathy Preston and Martin Rumscheidt, a theologian and son of Nazi industrialist perpetrators. It was moving to bring together two Christians, a Muslim, and a Jew, who together found common ground and healing in moving forward. Throughout the week Vahidin's witness and faith challenged us to step outside of our preconceptions and perhaps even our Islamophobia. It allowed us to make connections that were unexpected. It helped to build a bridge between Holocaust and genocide studies. It allowed us to face the truth that his religion and tradition has shaped his peacebuilding. For those who were there, his presence brought forward moments of healing and hope. As I presented on "Visiting Auschwitz: The Power of Place," I was grounded and humbled to have Vahidin there, knowing how difficult that place is for him and how it reminds him of his own experience in Bosnia.

One participant wrote, "I think it's so normal for someone who experienced what he did to hold on to hate, but Vahidin miraculously has not only let go of that hate but taken action to rise above it and work toward peace and reconciliation. I honestly don't think I've met a more altruistic human being. I'm so thankful for the experience." Another shared that, "I had unknowingly bought into the mantra of 'the infidel' Muslims propagated in the news and among friends. I am ashamed. . . . It wasn't that I thought all Muslims were terrorists; I just did not give any of them the chance to enter my tiny box!" Someone else offered, "Vahidin is . . . a true peacemaker! Leading one to make peace in our individual hearts, with our personal demons, with our enemies, with our neighbors, within our world."

When we allow ourselves to confront difficult things and to challenge the assumptions that can isolate us from others, I believe that we can find the healing and strength necessary for the work we need to do. Building these bridges, these interpersonal connections of witness, memory, and responsibility to shape a better world is work we need to do together.

– Tom White, Coordinator of Educational Outreach

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# The 2015 Summer Institute: Rejecting Despair Through Teaching

An extraordinary group of presenters, witnesses, and educators came together for our seventh biennial residential Summer Institute. The energy, focus, and comfortable rapport were felt from the first afternoon. Accommodating first-time attendees with previous participants, we focused on Holocaust and genocide topics while exploring effective pedagogical practices. We were very proud of KSC Holocaust and genocide studies student Emily Robinson, who presented an incredible lesson, using technology to weave many sources together. Her lesson will excite and expand the minds of young students.



Cohen Center's "Echoes and Reflections" trainer Jacqueline Hanlon, Somersworth Middle School, facilitates conversation at a break-out session during the Summer Institute.

Throughout the week, movements toward remembrance, prevention, and peacebuilding motivated all. Our two Croatian educators helped us significantly in this journey. For them and in turn for those attending, peacebuilding had a very personal component. How do we take care of ourselves (and our students) when exploring these dark topics? What is the purpose of what we do? **Kathy Preston**, who survived as a hidden child in Hungary, shared her history and participated in every session. She was a life-giving and life-affirming presence. We were indeed fortunate to witness **Stephan Lewy's** testimony. All of us shared a deep sense of responsibility when



Ambassador Siv (center) signed his memoir for our two Croatian educators Matija Cavar (left) and Josip Naglid (right)

## Hope Is a Sentiment that Rings True

Expressing what I witnessed at the Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies 2015 Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide is difficult, and yet hope is a sentiment that rings true. Elie Wiesel said, "Because I remember, I despair. Because I remember, I have the duty to reject despair." Moreover, in rejecting despair, we sow hope and reap promise. Despair is easy to find in a world full of conflict, and yet we can draw strength from people committed to a just cause. This summer, I witnessed individuals become a community dedicated to studying the Holocaust and other genocides. This devotion was fueled by the participants' energy and shepherded by gifted faculty and speakers. The community witnessed courage, redemption, and grace. They rejected despair. Their resolve gives all of us hope that the world can be better. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this remarkable program. Furthermore, I wish the Cohen Center Fellows the best of luck as they continue their essential work. for allowing me to be part of this remarkable program. Furthermore, I wish the Cohen Center Fellows the best of luck as they continue their essential work. Thank you for allowing me to be part of this remarkable program. Furthermore, I wish the Cohen Center Fellows the best of luck as they continue their essential work.

– John Sturtz

listening to this German survivor and US combat veteran and intelligence officer. **Sichan Siv**, a survivor of the Cambodian killing fields and later a US ambassador to the United Nations, was the keynote speaker for our Gathering of Friends dinner. He shared the remarkable story of courage and hope that is told in his memoir, *Golden Bones*. He later wrote, "Thanks so much for all the golden memories. It was indeed one of my favorite presentations."

I have shared my thoughts on another presenter who also joined us for many sessions, **Vahidin Omanovic**. As a Bosnian survivor and Muslim imam, he helped bring healing and hope, especially during a roundtable with Kathy Preston and Martin Rumscheidt on "Where do we go from here?" Vahidin not only brought healing and hope, but he inspired Fellows to connect their work this year with his Center for Peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina. One teacher

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Three survivors teaming up at our Summer Institute: (from left Vahidin Omanovic (Bosnia), Kathy Preston (Hungary), Sichan Siv (Cambodia)).

was so moved that she has begun work on a classroom teaching trunk that will tell the story of Bosnia and the importance of the work that lies ahead. We welcome any donations to help us complete this project.

KSC professor and Institute observer John Sturtz reflected on the week that “*hope* is a sentiment that rings true. Hopeful because I had the privilege of seeing a group of professionals come together and dedicate themselves to the notions of, to remember...and to teach... Teaching is a powerful mechanism in this process. Despair is easy to find in a world full of conflict, and yet we can draw strength from people committed to a just cause. The Summer Institute participants demonstrated a desire to reject despair through their teaching and or the betterment of their communities. The hope and promise resides in the ripple effect they will have with students.”

– Tom White, Coordinator of Educational Outreach

## Keene State Grads Making a Difference

Two of our recent graduates in Holocaust and genocides studies, Kelly Christianson and Alex Habibi, are now serving in the Peace Corps in Rwanda and Cambodia, respectively. They are active in post-conflict situations, putting their experiences at Keene State College to work in areas they studied while students. Kelly identifies herself as “an Owl abroad” and reports that she has received her site placement in a small village on top of a mountain in Rwanda’s Eastern Province – about an hour’s walk uphill from the main road. She is focusing on learning the local language, Kinyarwanda, and recounts on her blog that she “did perform better than I anticipated that I would for the oral proficiency exam, scoring a level of ‘novice high,’ which basically means I speak like a two-year-old child. One of the comments I received back from the tester read as follows: ‘Kelly needs a sympathetic listener to be understood.’ I totally agree with this statement, but I don’t know how sympathetic my listeners will be for two years.”

Alex is placed in Kampong Cham Province for the next two years. “It is located along the Mekong River,” he writes. “It has a lot of rice fields and rubber plantations. Before the Khmer Rouge, it was a hub of Cham culture. The Cham are an ethnic minority here that primarily follow Islam and speak Cham, a language closely related to Malay.” In a later email he reported, “The most memorable moment so far was my visit to the Tuol Sleng prison in Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge used it as a prison and torture center for supposed enemies of the state. Only seven men survived captivity here. One man, Lok Chum Mey, works there and shares his story with visitors. When my cohort and myself ‘sampeahed’ him” – offered him the traditional Cambodian greeting – “he asked in Khmer to our tour guide, ‘Where do these people come from?’ I answered in Khmer and explained our work. He was shocked to hear a Westerner speak Khmer, he said. He gave me his memoir for free while wishing my cohort good luck and thanking us profusely.”





**Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies**

## Cohen Center Receives Book Donation



A rare 1937 book outlining Nazi citizenship expectations for German citizens was given to the Cohen Center. This book outlines and tries to explain Nazi ideology in the wake of the Nuremberg Laws of 1935. Rena Jacques, who grew up in Breslau during the Nazi era and whose family was active in German resistance, has been working on translating the “Nazi speak.”



“Aside from other words and phrases that reflect Nazi views of politics, religion, personal and political philosophy and everyday living, there are totally new designations that had to be invented,” she reports. It has been emotionally difficult for Rena to revisit that time and especially trying to decipher Nazi lingo that was eliminated after 1945. According to Rena, many of the educated

German population hated this bastardizing of the language of their poets and thinkers and made (very secretly) fun of it. Of course such mockery was dangerous and could raise the suspicion of the neighborhood block warden and be reported to the Gestapo – as happened to Rena during the war.

The book, along with Rena’s translations, will be available for students and other interested people. Thank you, Rena, for all your arduous work on this project!