



Hans Heilbronner a professor of emeritus of History at the University of New Hampshire and a Holocaust survivor spoke at the Kristallnacht ceremony.

Remembering lives lost on the night of broken glass

Caitlin Baum **Posted: 11/16/06**

Two performers in black cloaks stood before an audience at Keene Middle School last Thursday. In a dark, silent room the breaking of a glass began introduced "The Night of Broken Glass," a ceremony to remember Kristallnacht and call attention to Dafur.

"Dafur is a humanitarian disaster," said Anna Tilton, a representative of the N.H. House and fellow at the Cohen Center for Holocaust Studies at Keene State College.

Tilton said 400,000 civilians have been killed and 200 million people have had to leave their homes in the war torn region of Sudan. People are facing starvation, disease, murder and rape every day.

"When I think about Dafur, it makes me sick. People are in fear of waiting for hope that never comes," she said. "We are extending a call to action. People need your help today."

"It's a great opportunity to draw attention to Dafur," said Katie Spain, a senior at KSC. "A lot of people don't know anything about Dafur."

A testimony of Kristallnacht by 14-year-old Ester Ascher was read out loud to the audience.

"My mother gave me and my brothers 20 marks in case we were separated," she said.

"This is a commemoration of the night of Kristallnacht in 1948 Germany," said Kim Maleski, a fellow at the Cohen Center. "Troops came into Jewish homes and businesses and smashed everything in site."

Hans Heilbronner lived through Kristallnacht and spoke.

"My life changed forever on Jan. 30, 1933," said Heilbronner, professor emeritus of history at the University of New Hampshire.

Heilbronner said his friends stopped speaking to him. "I was suddenly an outcast," he said. "I was ignored by students and teachers made me feel unwelcome." He said he was beat up and viewed as different. "I couldn't use swimming pools or park benches."

"My experience is minuscule to Darfur but this was the first time in history, that almost ultimately led up the extermination of a race," said Heilbronner.

"A woman called my house asking my father for help. When he arrived he was arrested," he said. "We had no idea where he was until the police came and handed my mother my father's keys."

His father would be released if he turned over his prized Mercedes Benz. The family gave up the car and Heilbronner said his father was released. He was told to leave and never come back or he would be arrested again.

"There was a Jewish organization in Switzerland that rescued Jewish children," said Heilbronner. "My brother and I went in the spring of 1939, leaving my parents. It turned out that the home was for delinquent boys."

Heilbronner said relatives rescued them and they got on the last boat to go across the English Channel.

Two days later World War II broke out. "If I had missed that boat, I would not be here today to share my story," he said.

Heilbronner said his grandparents owned a clothing store which was destroyed. A woman bought a bolt of cloth from the store in protest because it was forbidden to buy items from Jewish businesses. She saved it for 70 years and still has it today.

"This ceremony is a remembrance for the people that died and we are keeping it alive and not forgetting," said Jane Bergeron, fellow of the Cohen Center.

"The eyewitness are aging or dying and we need to pass it on so that it never happens again," she said.

Bergeron, a social studies teacher, said if history isn't known, the bad parts will be repeated.

Maleski said there is documented information of people in Darfur being slaughtered, and people should be aware of what's happening.

"The commemoration of this event started with 10 people on a sidewalk in Keene lighting candles. Now we have 100 people," said Maleski. "Every year at the same time of year, the Keene community comes together."

"This night will let people know what happened and keep them aware," said Linda Warn, an English as a second language teacher.

Spain said she is taking a Holocaust class and it was a requirement for her to attend the

event.

"I want to get a better understanding of what happened on that day," said Spain. "It's also a supplement to what I have been learning in my Holocaust class."

The message of the night was "we must always remember," and four candles were lit to signify the lives lost.

"I thought it was wonderful," said Silvia MacBeth, a volunteer for the Cohen Center. "The art and music were moving. I think it's great that the community is involved in it."

"I have been to a few ceremonies before."

"The testimonies were the most moving for me," said artistic director Larry Siegel.

"I am always grabbed by the testimonies, by hearing perspectives of the children." Siegel said he has been to a few ceremonies before and the testimonies are what get him the most. "I thought it was very well done," he said.

A sixth grade teacher asked students to perform in a dance.

"I think it was a powerful dance and moving," said Hailey Cook, a seventh-grader at Chesterfield Middle School. "People need to think about this."

"I was invited to present in the performance," said Paula Aarons, a choreographer and performer.

"I was really trying to present a piece about those who died."