



"To Remember... and to Teach"

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Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

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The Sage

Elie Wiesel tells a story that invites repeating, indeed elaboration, as those who hear it make it their own in a chain of memory, witness, and responsibility.

There once was a land ruled by a selfish and often ruthless figure. Little in his world escaped his notice or reach. One day he learned of a wise one at work in his domain. The storied sage brought healing and wholeness to those who welcomed this wise figure into their homes and lives. Indeed, the wise one, it was said, could see into people's hearts and minds – even discerning the future – not by predicting what would occur, but by knowing the deep directions of things as they emerged on the near and far horizons. The ruler grew concerned when he heard there was someone like this in his domain. So he sent his deputies to find this wise person and to bring the sage to him.



And so the sage was summoned to stand before the ruler and face the ruler's demands and interrogation.

When the sage was brought before the ruler, the ruler stood on a platform before the sage. The ruler's hands were hidden from view behind his back. And from this commanding position, the ruler spoke:

"Behind my back I hold a bird. Tell me if

the bird is living or dead. I hear that you are wise and know the hearts and minds of others. And that you know the way of future events. Show me, if you can. Demonstrate your wisdom, if you dare."

The sage looked deep into the unflinching eyes of the ruler. But the wise man held his speech, saying nothing. The sage just looked and held the ruler's regard.

The ruler soon grew impatient as the silence increased with fullness. "Tell me your answer, I require it," he said.

The sage knew. The sage knew the fate of the bird because the sage knew the heart of the ruler. The bird must be alive. For only if the bird was still alive would the ruler be in control. If the sage said the bird was alive, the ruler would crush the bird and win the contest he waged. If the sage said the bird was dead, the ruler could show the living bird. Any other option left the ruler at risk. Only this option left the ruler in control of his game of wit and power. The ruler would not hedge his bet. So the bird must be alive. And yet, the sage also knew that any guess, even the correct answer, would condemn the bird to an unwelcome fate. So the sage remained silent.

Still the ruler pressed, demanding a reply. His contest of will and power required satisfaction.

The sage grew intensely focused. Then he spoke in the most measured way:

"You ask me to read your mind and to see beyond the present. I cannot. You also ask me if the bird you hold within your power is living or dead. I cannot determine that either. But, I say to you the truth you know: the answer is in your hands."

The sage made an alternative wager – for life, not for power. And the answer was, indeed, in the other's hands.

The story is a Jewish tale, related in much simpler fashion and with variations that reflect the occasions in which the story

was told. In each of them, Elie Wiesel spoke from his own heritage to a gathering of Jews and Gentiles, building a narrative bridge from his experience to theirs. In the sharing of the story, the story's wager was extended, inviting those who dare, those who care, to regard themselves anew as guardians of life and memory now artfully placed in their hands ...

– Hank Knight

Upcoming Events

March 2-4, 2012

Annual student trip to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC.

April 2, 2012

Genocide Awareness Lecture and Susan J. Herman Award for Leadership in Holocaust and Genocide Awareness – This event features guest speaker Ervin Staub, author of *Overcoming Evil: Genocide, Violent Conflict and Terrorism*. We will also take some time to hear about "What One Voice Can Do" from the 2012 recipients of the Susan J. Herman Award for Leadership in Holocaust and Genocide Awareness.

April 16-19, 2012

Days of Remembrance: Hildebrandt Award and Yom HaShoah Commemoration – The week will begin with the presentation of the 15th annual Charles Hildebrandt Holocaust Studies Award. Special guest lecturer Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs, Ina Levine Invitational Scholar at the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, will join us for the Yom HaShoah commemoration.

Civic Leadership Initiative

The Cohen Center, in partnership with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, brought 24 civic leaders from the Keene area to USHMM in October 2011. The group toured the museum's permanent exhibit and had follow-up workshops with museum staff. Members of the New Hampshire Congressional delegation joined us. We hope that this initiative becomes a prototype for other New Hampshire communities. Our



TOM WHITE

shared goal is to disseminate and advance knowledge about the Holocaust and to encourage reflection upon the history and lessons of the Holocaust that are relevant to contemporary social issues, the moral and spiritual questions raised by these events, and our responsibilities as citizens of a democracy living in its shadow. We hope to connect and support community leaders as we seek to fulfill the Cohen Center's mission, "that present and future generations take responsibility for building a world free of antisemitism, intolerance, and hate."

Cohen Center Holds First Fellows Summit

Cohen Center Fellows are professionals in the education community who have completed the Cohen Center's Summer Institute. After graduating from the Institute, Fellows become liaisons to their communities for the Cohen Center. On October 14, twelve Cohen Center Fellows from three states met with Tom White in the first Cohen Center Fellows Summit. The day began in an atmosphere of excitement and friendship, and the group set short- and long-term goals for our community of practice. One of the short-term goals is to meet four times a year to share lessons and projects and generally support each other in teaching the Holocaust and genocide. Long-term goals include creating curriculum for teachers and creating presentations that can be taken throughout New England. A committee of Fellows is also working on a mission statement for our community of practice. We plan to meet again in January to further discuss how we can best support each other and our fellow educators.

– Lindsay Levesque

Yad Vashem's Echoes and Reflections

We are pleased to announce that Glenda McFadden has been chosen to represent the Cohen Center as a New England presenter of Yad Vashem's Echoes and Reflections curriculum. McFadden is a Cohen Center and Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR) Lerner Fellow (2006) and JFR Goldman Award winner for Excellence in Holocaust Education.

Seventh Graders Create a Teaching Garden

In January of 2011, after their study of the Holocaust, several seventh-grade students from the Cooperative Middle School in Stratham, NH, came together to continue their study. Inspired by viewing "Paper Clips" and hearing and meeting Thomas Weissshaus, a survivor currently residing in Exeter, NH, they wished to honor victims and survivors, especially the 1.5 million children who perished during this time. Remembering that butterflies are a symbol of hope and freedom, they decided upon a butterfly garden in memory and honor of the children of the Holocaust.



DEB BARRY

Tom Weissshaus with Stratham students at the groundbreaking ceremony.

The group, Wings of Tolerance, along with their teacher, Melissa Tobey, Tom Weissshaus, and CCGHS Fellow Deb Barry, participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the garden, to be called Raoul Wallenberg's Children's Garden, at Founder's Park in Exeter on August 20, 2011. Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who risked his life on many occasions to save people from Nazi persecution, saved Tom as well. A letter from Senator Jeanne Shaheen commending the group's work and especially recognizing Tom's outreach activities as a survivor was read by a member of the senator's staff. This garden will not only be a tribute and memorial, but an instrument for teaching others about tolerance, acceptance, and diversity.

For more information about Wings of Tolerance and the garden, contact Melissa Tobey: metobey@sau16.org.

2011 Summer Institute

This summer brought 33 people to campus to study in our fifth week-long residential Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide. The 2011 Institute was dedicated to the memory of **Suzan Howard Schafer Meiszner**, who was a tireless supporter of the Center and whose work ensured the financial support that makes this Institute possible. We are deeply grateful for the support of the New Hampshire Humanities Council; the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of Norma and Lester Cohen in honor of their anniversary; and Fran and Dick Winneg.

The Institute was a remarkable experience. For the first time, Fellows (previous graduates of the Institute) were offered a seminar experience led by Hank Knight, while I led new students in the Institute's colloquium. The Institute was planned around daily themes meant to integrate the interdisciplinary approaches to the Holocaust and genocide. It was important for the Fellows to address the complexities of approaching Holocaust and genocide studies through these various prisms. Answers are never simple. We struggle with myriad motives, social pressures, and ideologies that are fluid, depending on circumstance and individual choice. But always, there is responsibility for our choices. It is important to us that our Fellows challenge their students to think in these complex and contextual ways.

The strength of the Institute continues to be the excellent multi-disciplinary faculty who are part of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies major at Keene State College. They spent much of the week with the Fellows and for the first time conducted evening tutorials in their areas of specialization. This reinforced interpersonal connections, created a greater breadth of interpretation, and made the topics more accessible and nuanced.



Once again, we were blessed by an extraordinary group of witnesses: **Stephan Lewy**, native of Berlin, Germany, and one of the four survivors featured in the film "Telling Their Stories: N.H. Holocaust Survivors Speak Out"; **Walter Rosley**, who told his remarkable story of survival from the Nazi camp system; **Tom Weisshaus**, who discussed his life in hiding in Nazi Budapest while reinforcing a central theme of the Institute, that we are dealing with targeted people and not simply "victims"; **Martin Rumscheidt**, child of Nazi perpetrators, who wrestled with his personal shame and modeled what it means to live responsibly in the shadow of the Holocaust; and the United Kingdom's Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, **Sir Andrew Burns** (above), who spoke at Shabbat at Congregation Ahavas Achim in Keene and spent the final day of the Institute in conversation with Institute Fellows. Our deepest appreciation goes to the members of Congregation Ahavas Achim, who so warmly welcomed us once again. As one Fellow related, "The Shabbat service was an incredible closure and transitional event!"

Sir Andrew Burns said, "I was enormously impressed by the work and ambience of the Cohen Center... I found the Saturday discussion most interesting and illuminating: what good work you do to encourage so many people toiling on their own in the Holocaust vineyard."

One of the most encouraging outcomes of this summer's Institute was the connections and potential future collaborations made with our overseas participants. Working in collaboration with the U.S.



2011 Summer Institute Fellows

Holocaust Memorial Museum and the U.S. State Department, we worked with teachers from Hungary, Latvia, and Romania. Their contribution to the week was important and gave us a different perspective that illuminated our American approach to the Holocaust and genocide. Their enthusiasm has reinforced the Cohen Center's dynamic role as a catalyst and will help us explore ways in which we can continue to develop programs with them and use them as a resource in Europe.

Our Fellows are the crucial link between memory and conscience. We currently have 104 graduates from six states and seven countries. Education is our major weapon and our hope in the ongoing fight against antisemitism and bigotry, and our teachers are a voice against indifference.

– Tom White

Voices of the Summer Institute

"... an amazing experience that will change forever the way I teach the Holocaust and Genocide. I have been inspired in a way I had not imagined."

"The sense of community was an important part as well, as it was so important to be able to experience a full range of emotions in the presence of like-minded, supportive people."

"The depth and quality of the Institute presenters was absolutely amazing. KSC has such a high caliber of world-renowned scholars and is a valuable asset to the area."

"I come away from the Institute with several concrete examples of how to effect change. They include open discussion, the power of words, recognizing small 'evils' in ourselves as we navigate daily life, and making the impersonal personal."

From the Center Out

Witnessing Together: How We Remember the Holocaust

New initiatives are under way to develop a stronger professional community committed to doing the work of teaching and remembrance. Summer Institute Fellows who attended an educational summit in October created a new “community of practice” group that will allow teachers from across the region to come together quarterly to support one another, assess mutual needs, deal with pedagogical issues, and upgrade their knowledge and abilities.

The summit was held in order to help address a sense of isolation educators experience when they teach the Holocaust. Recognizing that teachers – especially those engaged in Holocaust and genocide studies – are confronting difficult and traumatic topics with their students, it is essential to support them. Their work asks them to model ways to “hold” the trauma to encourage individual reflection and responsibility. Often the topic itself unnerves and dislocates a student’s self-understanding, and teachers are the guide and support to allow for needed growth. This means that these relationships require more than an easy tweet or email, but long-term interpersonal work.

Teachers must also learn how to navigate in an age where constant information (not necessarily accurate knowledge) competes for our attention. The “Holocaust” and the Nazis are not unfamiliar terms in American society. On one hand, as Michael Berenbaum points out, we have been successful in making the Holocaust a mainstream topic of American consciousness. On the other, it may be that we are “overexposed to and undereducated about the Holocaust.” Has it become a grand metaphor for evil? Is it now merely a concept that competes with other “victimhood” narratives?

Holocaust movies, for example, abound. They have structured narratives with well-developed plot lines that make the subject, though difficult, more palpable, easily approachable, and, dare I say, entertaining. But is this not the very thing we seek to undo? Were not the Nazis masters at reducing issues for public manipulation and spectacle? The Holocaust has become part of American consciousness because the Nazis are the antithesis of what Americans value: free speech, civil discourse, rejection of polarizing demagogues, and respect for the rights of the other. If so, it is important to get the facts right and approach the topic with humility and sensitivity to the trauma. That is why manipulation of the Holocaust or the reductionist and simplistic use of Nazism as a weapon in a political debate has become so disturbing.

Not a week goes by without some politician or pundit bringing the Holocaust or Nazis into a discussion. Some claim they are victims of a “blood libel,” while others may desperately push an agenda to remove fluoride from water, believing somehow in a bizarre conspiracy theory (straight out of Dr. Strangelove) that the Nazis introduced fluoridation as the first step of mind control of the German population.

As teachers, we must restore complexity to our sense of the past, while recognizing that we must not reduce, trivialize, or manipulate it to serve our own purposes. At a recent workshop for middle school teachers, the topic of bullying was on everyone’s minds. The callous disregard for others and the inability to perceive the other was front and center in the conversation. Teachers were frustrated that students did not perceive this as victimization. Perhaps we should ask, instead, what allows us to target an

“Meeting and studying with others interested and invested in this work is more than a way to get support as an educator, but an opportunity to affirm life and hope in a confused and wounded world. Thank you!”

– 2011 Cohen Center Fellow

“other” individual or group? What does it mean to be a targeted person or people? What sources of authority or culturally accepted values allow us to legitimate violence, antisemitism, and bigotry over time? What is my responsibility as I stand in witness for the other?

Alvin Rosenfeld’s *The End of the Holocaust* is an important work that will help those who wrestle with how we, as American teachers, remember and teach the Holocaust. Rosenfeld’s chapter on the “anguish of witness” highlights the difficulty in “normalizing” Holocaust memory. Survivor Jean Améry struggled to come to terms with his experience. Any sense of security or trust in the world had been ripped from him. “Such loss” he wrote, “is not only radical, it is irrevocable ... For nothing is resolved, no conflict is settled, no memory has become a mere memory ... Nothing has healed ...” The “survivor” remains tormented. In

The Memory Keeper

Father Patrick Desbois, author of *The Holocaust by Bullets* and president of Yahad-In Unum, spoke to 350 people from the Keene State and greater Monadnock region community at the Holocaust Memorial Lecture on October 10, 2011. Father Desbois spoke about his work and the work of Yahad-In Unum in identifying World War II mass gravesites throughout the Ukraine. Nazi mobile death squads would arrive in a village, round up the Jews and Roma, and then systematically kill them one by one. "One bullet would equal one Jew and one Jew would equal one bullet," Father Desbois told us. "The Germans could kill thousands of Jews in one day."



MARK CORLIS

In a race against time, Father Desbois and a team of nine researchers from Yahad In-Unum arrive in a village and start asking "positive questions" of the older residents: "Excuse me, Madame, were you here during the war?" and if they say yes, then ask more questions. "Will you tell us? Will you talk to the camera?" The witnesses range from neighbors who had watched out a window to those who went to the killing site. Then there are the witnesses who were requisitioned by the Nazis to do the dirty work – to dig the graves, to feed the soldiers while they worked, or to pack up the belongings of those who perished. The witnesses lead the team to the site of the mass grave and tell the story. Father Desbois is careful not to ask leading questions, not to show emotion. He says of one witness who talked of seeing the murder of thousands of Jewish children, "He doesn't know my opinion and I never ask his ... We are there for the victims, not for the killers."

Father Patrick spoke of finding glimpses of those who perished – photographs, jewels thrown aside by women who did not want the Nazis to have their wedding rings or necklaces. When the team searches the area of a mass grave with metal detectors and finds these small treasures, the researchers are touched, Father Desbois says, "because we can say, 'Finally, we found you, 70 years later.'"

When asked about his faith and this work, he says, "We found the people whom no one wanted to find. Sometimes, we don't sleep well. It is the beginning of conscience. All my friends, all who do this work, are people who don't sleep well. I wouldn't want to be someone who slept well near the site of a mass grave." So he continues to document the mass gravesites and to collect the stories so that they can finally be at rest.

writing about Primo Levi, Rosenfeld concludes that Levi struggled with the anguish of his own survival, torn with guilt, shame, and futility. He uses Werner Weinberg's quote, "There are wounds that defy healing, and the reason is that they must not be allowed to heal," to illustrate what Primo Levi called "the survivor's disease." Rosenfeld's book helps teachers evaluate their own work, the purpose and goals of their teaching, and what "lessons" we seek to impart.

To begin to wrestle with these issues, it is helpful to recognize that the Holocaust is never *not* a Jewish event and at the same time it is also more than just a Jewish event. We must begin by acknowledging the Jewish experience and only then seek to find "universal meanings." In this "double knowing" (a concept that Hank Knight explained to our Fellows this summer), we begin to recognize when and how memory is vulnerable to distortion and exploitation.

To remember the Holocaust or any genocide, we must begin by mourning the lost. Lamenting the lost allows us to recognize their experience while not claiming it as our own. It is the beginning of respect for the victims and for ourselves. It allows us to witness without trivializing. Standing over the lost, as Father Patrick Desbois does (see "The Memory Keeper," at right), we can see how reductionist, hate-filled narratives about Jews fueled the destruction of European communities where people had often lived peacefully with their neighbors for generations.

We must continue to point out and resist trivialization and manipulation of Holocaust memories that seek to villainize an other. We ask ourselves and our students if there is anything in our tradition that dehumanizes, that makes someone or some group less than we are? Our moral engagement with the world begins by looking into the mirror of our others. We do this together, taking care of ourselves and our students by welcoming them with shalom, helping them hold the trauma, and leaving them ready to witness in a complex world. Our witness is humble, mournful, and communal. It rejects easy manipulation.

– Tom White

Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

Hildebrandt Award Reminder

Keene State College students, student in grades 5-12, and other New England residents are invited to submit proposals for an exceptional piece of Holocaust-related scholarly or creative work in the literary, visual, or performing arts. Submissions may include research papers or projects, essays, dance compositions or musical creations, poems, short stories, plays, films, or other visual works of art. Intent-to-submit forms may be downloaded from the Cohen Center website, keene.edu/cchs. Completed forms should be sent to the Cohen Center between December 1, 2011, and March 1, 2012. Final entries are due March 19. The award will be presented on April 16, 2012.

*1998 award winner "Arbeit Macht Frei"
by Roland Brassard '98*

