



# Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies

KEENE STATE COLLEGE ■ 229 MAIN STREET ■ KEENE, NEW HAMPSHIRE ■ WWW.KEENE.EDU/CCHS

## The Commons and the Integrity of And

If Woody Guthrie is right that this land is made for you and me, what does the "and" mean?

The theme for the 2013 College Symposium at Keene State was *Finding Your Place in the Evolving Commons*. A rich and historic term in our New England landscape, the commons has roots that reach back to classical times. The commons is the designated space a people set aside for public purpose and the common good. How that space is defined makes all the difference. When the space is open and welcoming, the commons is a place shared by friends and strangers. When the space is restricted, the commons is similarly limited. Its public life is restricted to that select few who count. When the boundaries are open and inclusive, everyone counts – even those who make us uncomfortable. Indeed, we frequently discover the commons during critical times when that public space is tested or wounded, or when it provides safe and needed room for managing difficult times. We can all remember times when we have relied on the commons or wept with its violation.

In many ways the commons is hidden in plain sight. Nevertheless, its role and presence in our lives is significant, if not pervasive. Traffic circles in our region offer concrete examples for us to ponder. They are designed to provide equal access to traffic intersections in the safest and most efficient manner possible. At its simplest, the rules of use are relatively obvious and easy to navigate:

- Slow down and enter the intersection carefully, giving the right of way to vehicles already in the circle.
- Yield to the vehicle to your left.
- Continue driving counter-clockwise until you reach your exit.
- If you miss your exit, go around again.

- Yield to the inside lane.
- Do not stop or change lanes in the circle.
- Exit carefully.

Clearly, the designated space of a roundabout is made for "you and me." It is inclusive, public space that works when its rules of order are followed.

With a little imagination we can project other kinds of rotaries and roundabouts that we construct for the common good. Indeed, when Congress works well, it operates in this fashion, observing its rules of order and common courtesy to introduce bills that



*Courtesy of NH Department of Transportation*

are debated round and round before being voted on to determine their destinations. When our schools work as a community's commons, they provide equal access to all. Students leave and return in regular rhythms until it is time for them to pass on to a more advanced commons requiring added skills of participation and negotiation. At the appropriate time students will exit for destinations that are accessible by passing through the intersection mediated by that commons. As these examples illustrate, the commons is typically space that we pass through, or in which we dwell for specific

time periods, to share communal resources, wealth, or purpose. The time we spend in them varies from commons to commons. A traffic circle is transitory space. A village or town square is space where we linger and commune. A school is space we inhabit with purposeful intensity – and in the case of public schools, a commons set aside for all our children. And here at Keene State College, Fiske Quad is space shared by a community pursuing the residential fruits of learning and play. Indeed, this commons takes on a ritual significance each May at commencement time.

In other words, the commons is liminal, or threshold space, linking people or guiding them in times of transition. When the commons is limited and restrictive, it is a privileged space where cooperation is reserved for a designated few. How we shape the commons matters, and reflects the kinds of communities we build and shape there.

Each year the Cohen Center joins with others in the Keene community to remember the pogrom of November 1938 in Nazi Germany called Kristallnacht. We recall that time to remind ourselves of the fundamental values at stake in the work we do with our neighbors here and beyond. We remember a rich, historic culture whose commons was remade into an intolerant place where the hospitality of Woody Guthrie's "and" was erased by institutionalized hatred and virulent antisemitism. There a nation proclaimed, "This land was made for *only* me (and those like me)." That is a chorus we do not want to sing.

If Woody Guthrie is right that this land is made for "you *and* me," what does the "and" mean? The answer is never less than commons sense.

*Hank Knight, Director*

# The Witness of the Righteous

This past summer the Cohen Center was pleased to host a traveling version of Yad Vashem's multimedia exhibit commemorating the 50th anniversary of Israel's recognition of the righteous gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. In 1953 Yad Vashem was charged by the State of Israel to develop and maintain a program recognizing those non-Jews who at the risk of their lives rescued or attempted to rescue Jews during this dark period of history. It was the Jewish people's way of honoring those who honored them with their respect and actions.

With significant support from our friends Jan and Rick Cohen, Yad Vashem launched their exhibit, *I Am My Brother's Keeper*, at Yad Vashem in June 2013. They prepared a special version of the exhibit for the Cohen Center, which they introduced at Keene State College on July 29. The project's developer, Ms. Yehudit Shendar, deputy director of the Museum Division and senior art curator, came to Keene to present an opening night lecture. Three more events followed, with special viewings and discussions afterwards. On each occasion, visitors to the exhibit encountered five paradigmatic stories that signaled the fuller texture of the stories of more than 24,000 individuals recognized by Yad Vashem for their acts of courage and compassion.

After the opening night viewing, Jim Rousmaniere, former editor of the *Keene Sentinel*, was moved to write a reflection for the paper the following week. He was particularly taken with the testimony of a Dutch farmer who had no idea that his deceased grandfather was a rescuer, or that his grandfather's actions on behalf of Jews precipitated his imprisonment by the Nazis and led to his eventual death. Behind his grandfather's apparently simple life lay a story of extraordinary courage. As with many of the stories of rescue, the risk he embraced was never just for a few minutes or hours, but for months or longer, and often involved placing loved ones at risk as well. At the heart of the heroism of the "Righteous Ones" was their extended embrace of others, frequently undertaken without calculation. Their deeds emerged from who they were – people who watched out for others. Indeed, the Righteous Ones' regard for others was often just as powerful as their acts of saving lives. Primo Levi, writing about his companion, Lorenzo Perrone, explains:

"... I believe that it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today; and not so much for his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of



Guests reading the banners for "I Am My Brother's Keeper" (photo by Mark Corliss)

being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage, extraneous to hatred and terror; something difficult to define, a remote possibility of good, but for which it was worth surviving. ...

"Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man."

The actions of the Righteous Ones saved many lives, and their regard for their neighbors, even when they failed, sustained a world worth dwelling in and living for.

Indeed, the Righteous Ones and their witness embody the teaching of the *Talmud* (*Sandhedrin*, 37a) that declares "whoever saves a life, saves the world entire."

Hank Knight, Director

Jewish legend has a story that captures the significance of what is at stake in the witness of the righteous. In each generation, so the legend goes, there are 36 righteous persons (Lamed Vovniks) hidden throughout the world whose presence ensures the survival of the world. In contrast to Cain, they are their brothers' and sisters' keepers, watching out for their welfare, offering them their respect and fidelity, even in the most extraordinary circumstances. They are ordinary people offering simple human decency in the most challenging times and situations. And if they should think themselves otherwise than ordinary, they would cease to offer what they do. Their significance is hidden even from themselves. And yet, the world we share with one another depends entirely on such as these.

<sup>1</sup> Jim Rousmaniere, "Definitions of Bravery" in the *Keene Sentinel*, August 4, 2013. Sentinel Source.com at [http://www.sentinelsource.com/opinion/columnists/definitions-of-bravery/article\\_3d104c2e-ec49-57ba-b4a1-5a1c555a2ede.html](http://www.sentinelsource.com/opinion/columnists/definitions-of-bravery/article_3d104c2e-ec49-57ba-b4a1-5a1c555a2ede.html).

<sup>2</sup> Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1986) 121f.

# Enriching Perspectives – The 2013 Summer Institute

The sixth biennial residential Summer Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide was made possible by a significant grant from the New Hampshire Humanities Council and our incredibly gifted staff of presenters, many of whom are part of the Holocaust and Genocide Studies major at Keene State College. We are also grateful for the work of Bill Shulman, president of the Association of Holocaust Organizations (AHO), for coordinating the participation of our Hungarian and Romanian teachers and for the members of Keene's Congregation Ahavas Achim who so warmly welcomed us for Shabbat. We are proud of the many partnerships that make this Institute such an enriching experience.



(L to R): Deb Watrous, NH Humanities Council; Ellen Kennedy, World Without Genocide; Keene State President Anne E. Huot; Tom White; Dr. Jim Grubman, child of survivors; Bill Leons, hidden child rescued in the Netherlands; Stephan Lewy, child survivor and "Ritchie Boy" (German expatriot who became part of Army Intelligence); Kathy Preston, hidden child rescued in Hungary; Fred Abrahams, escaped Nazi Germany in 1937; Rena Jacques, family involved in German resistance; Martin Rumscheidt, theologian; Hank Knight

"It is definitely something that I will always remember fondly because of the entire experience both personally and professionally. I would not trade this week for anything. Thank you for a wonderful and intense experience."

– 2013 Cohen Center Fellow

We currently have 126 Fellows (those who have successfully completed a summer institute and have accepted a service commitment) from eight states and seven countries. Our Fellows are a crucial link between memory and conscience as we respond to antisemitism, bigotry, crimes of mass destruction, and genocide.



Dr. Myrna Goldenberg with Stephan Lewy



2013 Summer Institute Fellows



New Cohen Center Fellow Agnus Pakurar, Hungary

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KSC 1909 Society for the fiscal year.*

## From the Center Out

A recent incident in Keene made me think about the power of targeting and how we may not be sensitive enough to how a targeted group perceives the world and what our responsibilities really are when we "remember... and teach."

When a friend sent images of Nazi graffiti that had been appearing in Keene since early spring my knee-jerk reaction was to "fix" things by having them removed. City leaders, some who participate in our annual Kristallnacht Remembrance or are part of our Civic Leadership Program, responded appropriately. I had, however, a lingering sense that simply removing the graffiti was not enough. Had I missed something? Thinking about it I realized that the graffiti had been around for a few months and no one had brought it to my attention. Indeed, few seemed to be aware of it. The problem therefore was not necessarily the graffiti, but the larger issue of our reaction (or non-reaction) to targeted hate speech. What is expected of us as civic leaders and stewards of our city's climate of hospitality and respect? Sensitivity and shared responsibility.

We cannot easily dismiss or fail to register things like this. It is good to consider the issue through the lens of targeted groups within society who constantly live in a different perceptual reality. One Jewish friend told me, "It's like living every day waiting for the floor to drop out from beneath you." Imagine feeling that at any moment, no matter how secure you feel in a given community, antisemitism or bigotry could baselessly target you and your life could all change in an instant. With such graffiti already documented in outlying towns, its appearance in our city must create an instant awareness of what is at stake not only for targeted groups, but for society in general given the historical record.

National Socialism, often the modern root of such graffiti, sought to usurp the public space, identify diversity as a "problem to be solved," and create a "pure" space, cleansed of "others," where society would be shaped by Nazi racial and ideological fantasies. Our challenge, therefore, reflected in this year's Keene State symposium, is to embrace diversity and ask, "What is my place in the evolving commons?" Having the graffiti removed had solved my immediate problem, but had it done anything to strengthen our community and the social bonds and covenants that help us respect our diversity? Had we done anything to alert the target group that not only were we aware of the rupture to our common space, but that we also recognized the pain, perhaps fear, and especially the memories that this graffiti revived?

More is required of us as we live in a world aware of the potential risks of public space violated and usurped for a particular agenda or ideology. We are required to respond effectively to hatred, bigotry, and antisemitism, but we must do so without reducing problems to something with quick fixes without considering the targeted others. Our programming this year will wrestle with this challenge. We will also explore ways we can all work together to address what is at stake for those within our community.

*– Tom White, Coordinator of Educational Outreach*



## Jewish Foundation for the Righteous

Michele Caccavaro, a Newport High School English teacher and Cohen Center Fellow, had the opportunity to participate in the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous' (JFR) annual summer institute at Columbia University. Caccavaro attended the Cohen Center's Summer Institute for Teachers in 2011. The JFR institute topics covered Stories of Rescue, Law and the Holocaust, the Inter-war Period, and the Refugee Policy, to name a few. The highlight of this institute for Caccavaro was being able to meet Holocaust survivor Roman Kent, who read his children's book *My Dog Lala*. Caccavaro uses testimony from Kent in her Voices of the Holocaust class at Newport High School and was thrilled to have the opportunity to meet him. As a JFR Center of Excellence in Holocaust education, the Cohen Center is able to send teachers to this enriching program.

## October 30 Workshop “Productive and Rewarding”

Alan Rosen, lecturer in Holocaust Literature at the International School for Holocaust Studies at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, presented “To Capture the Fire: The Life and Works of Elie Wiesel.” The workshop was designed to explore *Night* as a “launching pad” for Wiesel’s prolonged journey toward meaning about the Holocaust and about life. This workshop explored ways of transforming adversity and trauma by highlighting the need to ignite the spark within ourselves and our students to explore meaning and mindfulness in our lives. The day helped to reinforce ideas of compassion, joy, and celebration of learning while holding the trauma and honoring those who were targeted.

Following the event participants offered these thoughts:

“What a blessing for me to sit for a day and learn, truly learn, and not be entertained with a series of PowerPoint slides.”

“Dr. Rosen is a gifted teacher, so patient and skilled at communicating this complex topic to those of us who are searching. Please convey to him my deepest appreciation for an unforgettable day. I return to the classroom a better teacher.”

“Yesterday was amazing! Alan was masterful in shedding light on Wiesel’s sophisticated and emotionally challenging writing. He also did an incredible job engaging the class in a very effective way.”

“The supreme sensitivity and support for the dignity of each person was extraordinary. ... He embodied a teacher who sees the “divine spark” in each person. ... I learned that *Night* is a “launching pad” (to use Alan’s phrase) for Wiesel’s prolonged journey toward meaning about the Holocaust and about life. ... I was encouraged by wonderful colleagues. Their compassion and sophisticated understanding was extraordinary!”



*Alan Rosen, photo by Tom White*

## News from the Cohen Center Fellows

Erzsébet Simon (Hungary) is creating a national art competition for high school students in connection with the Holocaust. It will be advertised in two categories: grades 9-10 and grades 11-12. The awards ceremony will be held on April 16, 2014, in his school in Szekszárd. Ersi adds that he still misses the wonderful community we had in Keene during the 2013 Summer Institute.

Melinde Lutz Byrne, Boston University, spoke to a small group at a meeting of the Merrimack Valley Chapter of MASSOG, held at the Nevins Library in Methuen, about the 2013 IAJGS (International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies) Conference, where she attended a committee meeting on the teaching of Jewish genealogy at the university level. The discussion of Holocaust-related research was very moving and intense. About half the attendees had no prior experience with this topic and some remarked that, though they were in school in New England after the war, nothing was taught about the Final Solution.

### October 26 CCHGS Fellows Retreat

Keene State College professor Tom Bassarear led a day-long workshop on October 26, 2013, for Cohen Center Fellows: “How do we hold the pain of the world, take care of ourselves and our students, without being overwhelmed?” Eighteen Fellows participated in a day of guided meditations and discussions about both the meditations and the larger issue of suffering. There were several discussion periods: time to ask questions about the meditation practices and time to share and support one another. It was a remarkably enriching and refreshing day.



*Tom Bassarear and participants of the Cohen Fellows retreat, photo by Tom White*

# “Lost” Between Memory and History: Writing the Holocaust for the Next Generation

Over 250 people came to hear Daniel Mendelsohn talk about his book, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, on Thursday, October 3. Described as part memoir and part mystery, *The Lost* is the story of Daniel Mendelsohn’s search to find the truth behind what happened to his Uncle Shmiel and Shmiel’s family. Memory and the idea of personal truth were the threads woven through the talk. Mendelsohn searched for his six family members on a well-used database for Holocaust scholars, only to discover that there were several inaccuracies, including an incorrect date of birth and death. This is what prompted the search for more information and to discover those who knew his family.

“It is the difference between what happened versus the story of what happened,” Mendelsohn said. He went on to explain that there is an unreliability of witnesses. His own grandfather, for example, told many colorful and wonderful stories about trivial things and no stories about personal things – a result, Mendelsohn believes, of the burden of guilt his grandfather carried all those years and what ultimately led to his grandfather’s suicide. Mendelsohn reminds us that the players in even the

“crucial events, while important sources, always have agendas; can always be hiding things or someone, protecting things or themselves or covering up sins of their own or others.”

In Mendelsohn’s work, memory and history become opposing forces. One is the random chance of what we can recall and preserve and the other is the will and desire to present certain things and repress others. It is this struggle that leads to problems with history and memory. Mendelsohn reminds us that even the historian is not transparent. “The story you get in the end is one in which the historian decides what to tell you, what will enthrall you.”

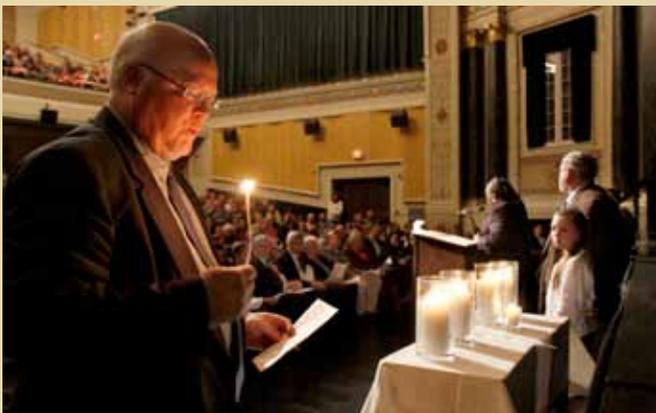
Mendelsohn concluded his lecture by discussing both the importance of



Daniel Mendelsohn, photo by Mark Corliss

historical representation and the value of personal storytelling. Although the two are of equal importance, it is also necessary to understand their differences. Both provide the next generation with a glimpse of what the past was like and provide a greater understanding of the atrocities people endured. His book, *The Lost*, was written as a family history and a personal history, and is now promoted as Holocaust history. His story is becoming part of this difficult history.

## Kristallnacht Commemoration



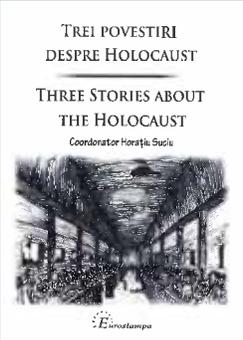
Phil Suter, Greater Keene Chamber of Commerce, lights a candle at Kristallnacht, photo by Michael Moore

This year’s commemoration took place on November 7, 2013, at the Colonial Theatre in downtown Keene. Guests included the Keene Middle School Choir; MoCo Arts; members of the community; city leaders including leaders of the Fire and Police Departments; Kristallnacht survivor Stephan Lewy; hidden child and Holocaust survivor Kathy Preston; a representative for Bill Leons, a hidden child and survivor; and Michael Berenbaum, director of Sigi Ziering Institute, professor of Jewish Studies, American Jewish University. Over 700 people filled the theatre as we commemorated the 75th anniversary and reflected upon the charge of Keene State College’s Eighth Biennial Symposium, “Finding Your Place in the Evolving Commons.” We are deeply grateful for our partnership with the Colonial Theatre in making this annual ritual such a success.

**Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies**

# Surprise gift arrives at the Center

Romanian Cohen Center Fellow Professor Horatiu Suciú has donated *Three Stories About The Holocaust* to the Charles A. and Judy M. Hildebrandt Collection. Based on testimonies of three Romanian survivors, these graphic novels were illustrated, after meticulous research, by Horatiu's students.



## Coming Events: Spring and Summer 2014

**March 3, 2014**

Genocide Awareness Lecture with Mathilde Mukantabana, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Rwanda to the United States of America

**March 28-30, 2014**

Annual trip to US Holocaust Memorial Museum for Keene State College students

**April 27, 2014**

Charles A. Hildebrandt Holocaust and Genocide Studies Awards

**April 28, 2014**

Days of Remembrance

For more information, check [www.keene.edu](http://www.keene.edu) or call the Cohen Center at 603-358-2490.

