

## **Lawrence Alan Spiegel Remembrance Scholarship**

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### **Why is it important that the remembrance, history, and lessons of the Holocaust be passed to a new generation?**

The words from Elie Wiesel's autobiography, *Night*, resound when I think about why we must remember the Holocaust, "For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time." We have a duty to ensure that future generations don't just learn from the Holocaust, but that they also gain a greater understanding of the magnitude of the events that changed the world forever.

My Grandfather, Maurice A. Sherman, served in the United States Army during the Second World War as a forward observer for the artillery, he saw first-hand the terrible destruction that the Nazis were capable of. He was wounded in action in Italy and earned a Purple Heart for his sacrifice. After the war, he attended Wentworth College on the G.I. Bill. As one of six children, who grew up during the depression, higher education would have been unattainable for him, but as a result of the war, he was able to go to college, which had been a life-long dream for him.

The memories of all three of these experiences – surviving the depression, service during the Second World War, and attending college - have been passed down from one

generation to the next in my family, along with Gramp's words of wisdom that, "Your education is the only thing that can never be taken away from you."

It appears to me that there is a sacred sense of duty that the memory and history of the Holocaust be passed on to the new generation. Certainly its documentation can be found in books, and old newsreels, and modern movies based on actual events, but what could be more profound than hearing about the events from actual survivors. The people who were the Nazi's targets – the Jews, the Communists, people with mental or physical disabilities, the Gypsies, the Poles, people from other Slavic countries, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the homosexuals, people viewed as political enemies, and anyone who served in the Resistance from a multitude of countries. Basically anyone the Nazi's viewed as social deviants or trouble makers were thrown into the concentration camps against their will.

As difficult as it may be, it is necessary to study this time period, not just so we can affirm that this will never happen again, but so we can shed light on one of the darkest periods of mankind. It is estimated by scholars that 11 million people died during the Holocaust, six million were of the Jewish faith, and 1.1 million of the victims were children.

Despite the darkness of this topic, it is also just as important to highlight the acts of bravery and kindness that resulted under the Nazi's oppression – the individuals who worked tirelessly for the Resistance movements in occupied countries in Europe gathering evidence, operating clandestine wireless radios, using guerilla tactics and sabotage to slow the Nazi's progress; the families across Europe that hid and protected Jews from their oppressors (risking their own lives to do so); the Danish fishermen who

ferried Jews to safety in Sweden; and the Kindertransport which took Jewish children out of harms way just prior to the out break of the Second World War to live with British foster parents. Without remembrance and history what are we as a society? Without lessons and education where would be today?

As a student and a young man, recently celebrating my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, I also think that there is great importance in not only looking toward the past, but to also look toward the future, and in that I have had the great pleasure of taking four years of German and participating in the German American Partnership Program (GAPP) during my four years at Boothbay Region High School. My family and I have twice hosted a German exchange students, and in April I will travel to Germany to stay with my friend, Marc and his family, and will be reunited with my friend, Ava, who also stayed at my house three years ago.

This program was started in 1972 at the Goethe-Institut in Boston, Massachusetts, and partners with the German Foreign Office and the United States Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. To me what is so important about the program is the new friendships that are formed, the exposure to different cultures and language, and for the American students the opportunity to visit a concentration camp while they are in Germany. The United States was geographically removed from the Holocaust during the war, so being able to visit one of the concentration camp sites, is another way that the history of the Holocaust is not forgotten, it is tangible, I will be physically walking through the camp with my classmates, it is real, not just something I read about in a text book.

I often wonder what my Grandfather Sherman would think about all of this. His

generation viewed the Germans as the enemy and my generation views them as friends. I know one thing for certain, there is great value in remembrance, and in history and education, and there is also great value in forming new friendships.

In ending, the words of the Spanish/American philosopher, George Santayana seem appropriate, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." As a member of the new generation, I believe that it is not only important that we as a society remember, and that we never forget, but that we also move forward together to ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust are never repeated and that goodness prevails for everyone regardless of their religion, ethnicity, sexual or political beliefs.