VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

SPRING 2019
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VANCOUVER HOLOCAUST EDUCATION CENTRE

Yom HaShoah
HOLOCAUST COMMEMORATIVE EVENING

WEDNESDAY
MAY 1, 2019
7 PM

WOSK AUDITORIUM, JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTRE
950 WEST 41ST AVENUE, VANCOUVER
Everyone Welcome • No RSVP Required

Lillian Boraks-Nemetz
HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR
with
Nancy DiNovo, Violin
Cantor Yaacov Orzech

Holocaust survivors are invited to light a memorial candle

Presented by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. This program is funded through our community’s generous contributions to Federation Annual Campaign and by the Province of British Columbia. Supported by The Gail Feldman Heller Endowment & the Sarah Rozenberg-Warm Memorial Endowment Funds of the VHEC.
Artistic Producers: Wendy Bross Stuart & Ron Stuart, WRS Productions.

COVER: A Passover Seder in the ghetto. Warsaw, Poland, 1941. Courtesy of Yad Vashem.
An Invitation to Visit the Reopened Library

BY SHANNON LABELLE

The VHEC welcomes everyone to visit its redesigned library. The library underwent renovations in 2018 as part of our Renewal Project and has reopened in a new space at the Centre. Visitors will discover that the library has been outfitted with new shelving (offering more room for library acquisitions), improved lighting and a larger workspace for consulting materials from all of the Centre’s collections: library, archives, museum and survivor testimonies.

The library is a place for all to expand their knowledge of the Holocaust and genocide. The collection focuses on the causes, events, legacies, history and historiography of the Holocaust. The library’s holdings contain more than 4,000 books and audio-visual recordings including memoirs, novels, educational resources, rare books and special collections, yizkor (memorial) books that document the history of Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust, and materials for children and teens.
Some of the topics that can be studied and researched at the VHEC Library include, but are not limited to:

- Pre-war Jewish life in Europe
- Antisemitism before, during and after the Holocaust
- The rise of Nazism
- Nazi propaganda
- The persecution of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators
- The persecution of non-Jews under Nazism
- Jewish resistance against the Holocaust
- The experiences of Holocaust survivors
- The internment of “Enemy Alien” refugees in Canada
- The immigration experiences of Holocaust survivors to Canada
- War crimes trials
- The impact of the Holocaust on Second and Third Generations
- Holocaust denial
- Remembrance, memory and commemoration of the Holocaust
- Holocaust and genocide education
- The representation of the Holocaust in the arts, in novels and in film
- Comparative genocide studies

Educators, students, scholars, Holocaust survivors and their families, VHEC members and the general public are welcome to use library resources. The library is open to everyone, free of charge, during the VHEC’s weekday open hours. Visitors may independently browse and use most library materials on-site without an appointment, although booking an appointment ensures that the librarian or another Collections staff member will be available to offer search tips, locate items, provide access to rare books and special collections, answer research questions and recommend resources. Email library@vhec.org or call (604) 264-0499 to book an appointment.

BC teachers and current VHEC members may borrow circulating library materials for up to two weeks. To learn more about becoming a VHEC member, please visit our website (www.vhec.org).
The library collection can be searched in our online collections catalogue (www.collections.vhec.org) alongside archival materials, museum objects and survivor testimonies. The catalogue can be searched 24/7 from anywhere. A tablet computer is available at the VHEC to search the catalogue on-site. Please contact the VHEC if you do not find what you’re looking for — Collections staff welcome suggestions for acquisitions and on how we can improve our catalogue and services.

The library collection is the result of generous donations over the years from survivors, families of survivors, and community members. The VHEC continues to build its library collection by encouraging donations through an online wish list (www.vhec.org/support-us/donate-book-artifact/), which highlights desired items. Many of the titles on the wish list are suggestions the VHEC receives from teachers and researchers. Donations of wish list items can be purchased directly from the wish list or delivered from another source, such as a personal library collection or a local bookstore, to the VHEC. If you are interested in donating an item that you see on our wish list, please contact the VHEC. Tax receipts will be issued for all donations of new material to the library and donated items can be dedicated to friends and family (with a minimum donation value of $10 CAD).

The VHEC highlights new library acquisitions on its collections catalogue — just search for “New Library Items” in the search box at collections.vhec.org and you’ll find an online collection that includes all of the items added to the library in the past year.

We look forward to welcoming you to the library and helping with your learning and research needs.

Shannon LaBelle is the Librarian at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.
It Starts with You: Becoming Enlightened Witnesses to the Holocaust on Yom HaShoah

BY ANNA BRUDER

Acclaimed author Lillian Boraks-Nemetz has spent the past few decades of her life sharing her experience of the Holocaust with students across BC. On Wednesday May 1st, 2019, Lillian will share her story as keynote speaker for the Yom HaShoah Holocaust commemorative evening presented by the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre (VHEC). For Lillian, sharing her story has not been always easy or welcome. When she first came to Canada in 1947, no one wanted to hear her story, and that experience deeply affected her. The process of telling her story changed for Lillian because of the work the VHEC does with students, teachers and researchers every year.

Lillian was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1933 to a secular Jewish family. In 1940, Lillian and her family were forced to live in the Warsaw Ghetto where the survival rate for children was only ten percent. Lillian vividly remembers being separated from her parents when she was eight years old, a traumatic experience that has stayed with her to this day. As a Holocaust Survivor Speaker, Lillian shares with students her experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto and as a child who survived in hiding with a false identity. She speaks to students not only to remember and honour those murdered in the Holocaust, but to acknowledge the possibility that it could happen again due to racism and hate still present in our society.

Lillian has received immense compassion and sympathy from students over the years of sharing her story. After hearing her speak, these students become enlightened witnesses. Enlightened witnesses are individuals who listen to a survivor in a sympathetic and caring way and, as a result, may help the survivor to heal. These individuals — students, teachers and others — create
a safe space for survivors to share their most personal and harrowing experiences. For Lillian, sharing her story in this way with people who become enlightened witnesses is both heartbreaking and healing. Those who are witnesses to the eyewitnesses, she explains, share a commitment to not let the enduring lessons of the Holocaust be forgotten. She tells her audiences, “It starts with you.”

Unfortunately, the stories Lillian and other survivors share are as relevant now as ever. Rising antisemitism around the world and a recent survey² reporting that nearly a quarter of Canadian millennials have not heard of the Holocaust confirm that the lessons of the Shoah need to be taught.

Lillian’s message at Yom HaShoah will be a simple and powerful one: Silence is not an answer. For Lillian, every person, Jewish or not, who listens to a survivor has a responsibility to act. For myself, as a member of the millennial generation in Canada of which 22 percent have not heard of the Holocaust and 49 percent cannot name a single concentration camp, I hope as many people as possible heed Lillian’s message. We have a collective responsibility to be witnesses to the eyewitnesses and to share their story. Attending Yom HaShoah to commemorate the six million Jewish people who perished — of which one-and-a-half million were children — is an opportunity to become an enlightened witness, an opportunity that is extended to all residents of Vancouver and beyond.

Lillian has hope for the future because of museums and education centres like the VHEC that teach the Holocaust in order to educate about intolerance. And although many millennials have not heard of the Holocaust, 85 percent of Canadians surveyed believe that Holocaust education is crucial in schools. The teachers who bring their students to the VHEC, who invite Holocaust Survivor Speakers to their schools, and the members of the public who attend important events like Yom HaShoah, all play an active role in ensuring that the next generation of Canadians knows about the Holocaust and the moral lessons it has for our society. As Lillian says, it is “absolutely important for the Jewish and non-Jewish communities to attend Yom HaShoah.” In this way, we become part of the journey towards healing together.

On May 1st, everyone is welcome to become enlightened witnesses, to join Lillian on this journey of healing, a journey that should not be left to Holocaust survivors alone. Join us at the Wosk auditorium on Yom HaShoah and witness Lillian share her personal experiences during the Shoah.

Anna Bruder is a Research Assistant at the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre.

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The Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre provides educational tours and workshops to thousands of students and teachers every year. The current two-hour long program is based on the exhibitions *In Focus: The Holocaust Through the VHEC Collection* and *Faces of Survival — Photographs by Marissa Roth*.

In the interactive guided tour by a VHEC volunteer docent, students gain insight into the highlights of the VHEC collection that is comprised of rare artefacts, photographs, identification documents, letters and postcards. Students learn about local survivors of the Shoah who have been volunteers at the VHEC through a portrait series and engage with the survivors’ powerful messages to students.

The interactive workshop following the tour offers engagement with primary sources including eyewitness testimonies, discussion prompts promoting dialogue and critical thinking, and the crafting of a booklet based on an original VHEC artefact representing cultural resistance during the Holocaust.

To make this program possible, the VHEC relies on a dedicated team of volunteer docents (educators) who are committed to Holocaust-based anti-racism education and make themselves available during school hours to lead the tours and workshops.

VHEC docents represent a diverse group of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds, including teachers, business professionals and relatives of Holocaust survivors. Some docents are available to deliver tours and workshops in French or Hebrew. These devoted volunteers undergo thorough training to prepare for each exhibition and workshop the VHEC presents.

What follows are the reflections of three such volunteer VHEC docents on their experiences when engaging with students.
Kieran Forry

This is now my third year as a VHEC docent, and this continues to be a useful and rewarding experience, for myself and the school groups that take part in our programs. As a full-time high school teacher implementing the new BC curriculum, I find the choice of objects in the exhibitions and the learning outcomes of the workshops to be tailored specifically to the requirements of the new inquiry-based Social Studies curriculum. In addition, the varied and interesting artefacts ensure that tours can be focused on particular themes or topics that school groups might be studying.

I really like the interactive nature of the replica objects and accompanying tasks in the new In Focus exhibition, as they make the whole process even more engaging for the students. Indeed, engagement from students has been a constant throughout all of the various exhibitions and workshops I have had the privilege of being a part of through the VHEC. One of the things that has struck me about nearly every single group that has visited the new exhibition has been the willingness of students to engage with the artefacts, even during the short break they are given between the tour and the workshop. I often see them studying objects that were not part of their tour, or asking for further details about ones that were, and I think this speaks to the quality of the curation of the museum that it can engage students in such a way.

There was one instance where some students were studying the portraits of Holocaust survivors in the Faces of Survival exhibition, and were very excited to recognize one of the survivors who happened to be visiting the VHEC at the same time. I think this really brought home to them the fact that the Holocaust is not some distant historical event, but that it has effects that can still be felt today.

Dodie Katzstein

I enjoy leading student tours of the current exhibition. The challenge is to adapt the tour to the particular group. Every class is different, and I try to assess their level of knowledge and interest. If the students have been well-prepared by the teacher, they engage enthusiastically with the program. If the teacher or students tell me they’ve done little classroom preparation, I spend more time filling in the historical background to what they will see in the exhibit.

The students respond well to the hands-on activities. Because their time is limited, I focus on a few highlights of the exhibition. Students especially like the recipe book, bracelet and toy dog artefacts.

In the ethnically diverse Lower Mainland, many students who visit the VHEC have family roots in other faiths, including Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sikh. I emphasize that the Holocaust is not just something evil that happened to Jews a long time ago. The Second World War was probably not a
war experienced by their great-grandparents or even great-great grandparents. But they often can identify genocides that have affected their families in the past.

My message to the students is the need to respect — not just to tolerate — differences among people from other cultures. I ask if they have ever witnessed an incident of bullying or teasing of a classmate or friend because of their accent, what they wear or if what they eat for lunch is unusual. I encourage them to be an “up-stander” rather than a by-stander in such situations. We talk about the importance of respect for others in an effort to prevent catastrophes like the Holocaust from happening again.

My most memorable experience with this exhibition was a woman, a mother of one of the visiting students, who disclosed, apparently for the first time, that she was Jewish. Her mother had been filmed by the USC Shoah Foundation but had forbidden her daughter to look at or reveal it until after her death, which had recently occurred.

Dodie has been a volunteer with VHEC for more than 20 years as a Zachor contributor, Kristallnacht planning committee member, docent and media relations consultant. She writes, “My involvement with VHEC helps me to honour the memory of my paternal grandfather, Leo, and grandmother, Doris Katzenstein (for whom I am named), who were murdered in Nazi death camps before I was born. My father, Fritz Katzenstein, escaped to the United States in 1936, after finishing medical school, when he was forbidden to work as a doctor in Germany. I am currently researching my father’s and grandparents’ histories based on photos, documents, artefacts and recordings collected over several decades”.

LUCIEN LIEBERMAN

I have been a docent for at least 10 years and must admit that after each session with students (always high school) I leave with a sense of satisfaction, a sense of accomplishment because I consider Holocaust education important. However, as I have discussed many times with fellow docents, I leave with little sense as to how students feel about these visits to VHEC. This, despite the fact that teachers often follow up with written positive comments. I often wonder if the students go home and discuss what they learned with their parents and other family members.

While docents generally agree high school students are challenging to motivate to ask questions, make comments and provide answers to questions posed, the workshop associated with the current exhibition helps to start a two-way conversation where students write comments on a large paper in response to a quote from a local Holocaust survivor, or the students create a recipe book to help them relate to an artefact on display.

In a recent session the recipe book alerted me to the fact that my group, from a private Christian high school in Langley, were all descendants of Dutch families. Had I realized it earlier I might have spoken more about Jews in Holland during the occupation. At the end of this session, one boy stayed behind to tell me his great grandparents were farmers in Holland during the Second World War and hid a number of Jewish neighbors who survived to tell the story. The great grandparents were honored later for their deeds. I told the boy that this was a wonderful story and asked why he did not mention it in class. This would have given me an opportunity to start an interesting discussion. Perhaps this will give me a lead for future sessions.

I am reminded of a very good quote from a lecture given by Yehuda Bauer, an Israeli historian and scholar of the Holocaust.

“The Righteous Gentiles were few in number, but it is they who enable us to teach about the Holocaust. Without them, the Holocaust would be a tale of unrelieved horror and we cannot teach people, especially young people, a tale of unrelieved horror; the stories will be rejected, and no human lesson will be learned… The rescuers, few as they were, show us that we have another possibility within us.”

Lucien Lieberman has a degree in Chemical Engineering and an MBA and worked for 30 years in investment banking. This background served him well as the Treasurer for the VHEC in the years 1992-2010.
It was the summer of 1948. My parents, my brother and I stepped off the ship. We had reached our destination — Montreal.

The past was laid to rest, never to be talked about. Yet it was still a part of us as we could not purge the atrocities from our souls. Life went on, and my parents struggled, like all new immigrants, to learn a new language and earn a living. I began school and, at age eight, I was put into grade one, with six-year old children. Of course, I was the tallest in the class and sent to the back.

Unfortunately, I was never able to get the help I needed and I felt like a dummy right through school. My sports ability enabled me to make friends and academics went to the back burner. I also had a lot of common sense (sechel in Yiddish) so I was not perceived as dumb by my friends. As an adult I went into my own plumbing business and ended up to be very successful.

It took me another seventy years to go back in time to my past. By then I was living in Vancouver. After I retired, my wife encouraged me to join the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre. I knew that I had no grandparents, aunts or uncles; it was something I lived with. Now I wanted to put names to everybody. It also became important to me to see how and where they lived and died.

My wife and I decided that we would go to Poland with March of the Living* (MOL). There wasn’t an adult group leaving from Vancouver, so we joined the Toronto contingent.

Over the years we had watched documentaries, read books, and seen movies about the Holocaust, but we were in no way prepared for what we saw on our trip to the various camps. We were moved by the Memorial Park in Treblinka and were able to find a memorial.
Abe was born in Warsaw in 1940 and is a survivor of a labour camp in Siberia. *The Adult March of the Living is a journey to Poland and Israel to learn about the Jewish community that once flourished in Europe, the tragedy of the Holocaust, and the establishment and survival of the State of Israel. The opportunity to travel with Holocaust survivors is limited and Canadian adults are encouraged to take advantage of this unique experience.

We went through beautiful forests that became memorials for the people that were murdered there. Why, we asked? What happened to humanity in that period? After seeing and hearing what was done to these people, it was hard to go home and enjoy life.

We decided to hire a guide to visit the town where my relatives lived (fortunately our MOL guides were able to coordinate a side trip). We travelled about two hours from Warsaw to Grodzisk Mazowiecki where my parents were born. This was a small town where Jewish settlement dated to the 16th century. In the mid-19th century the town had a few thousand inhabitants, nearly eighty percent Jewish.

Today there are no longer any Jewish inhabitants in the town. I was told my mother had a little ice cream stand next to the railway station. Needless to say, it was no longer there. I was unable to locate the apartment my parents lived in as I had no address.

We visited the Jewish Cemetery which is adjacent to the railway station. The cemetery was destroyed by the Nazis. The devastation lasted even after liberation. In 2014 a developer wanted to build a residential complex on the land where the cemetery is situated, but the plans were suspended after the Jewish community of Warsaw protested. Now, the cemetery is being restored and tombstones have been returned, many of which are broken. I did find a stone of a relative that was buried there.

We saw the main avenue where the Jewish community used to walk and meet. I could just picture all the little shops and how wonderful life would have been in a town that size. It was so sad that my parents were the only ones that escaped. They begged their families to run with them, but it is difficult for people to believe the unbelievable.

We are still processing the experience, and we continue to question how this could have happened in a civilized world.

Abe was born in Warsaw in 1940 and is a survivor of a labour camp in Siberia.

Images taken by the Grossmans at Majdanek Concentration Camp, Poland. Courtesy of Abe Grossman.
To David.

He took notes.

He sat and listened as someone explained the minds of his murderers.

He processed and wrote down information about the people who stood by as human beings, fathers, mothers, babies, children, just like him,

were tortured and put to death.

He took it in and observed.

Who knew that pen and paper were hell fire resistant.

Did they foresee the strength he would possess?

A few more lines scratched the page.

Would they imagine that of all things to survive blind hate, humanity would be it?

He crossed his legs and rested his hands on his knees.

In a calm silence,

he took notes.

By Magalee Blumenkrans
THANK YOU TO OUR DEVOTED VHEC VOLUNTEERS!

OUTREACH SPEAKERS
Janos Benisz, Amalia Boe-Fishman, Lillian Boraks-Nemetz, Alex Buckman, Mariette Doduck, David Ehrlitch, René Goldman, Serge Haber, Jannushka Jakoubovitch, Chaim Kornfeld, Robert Krell, Inge Manes, Claude Romney, Martha Salcudean, Louise Sorensen, Peter Suedfeld, Tom Szekely, Robbie Waisman; Coordinator: Rita Akselrod.

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SPECIAL PROJECTS

OUR SINCERE APOLOGIES FOR ANY ERRORS OR OMISSIONS

HAPPY CHANUKAH
Meda Lerner, Happy Chanukah. Jonathan Lerner

GET WELL

Tommy Gelfand, A speedy recovery. Ida & Odie Kaplan.

Martha Salcudean, A healthy and speedy recovery. Louise Sorensen.


Leo Vogel, A successful and speedy recovery. Louise Sorensen.

Arailna Waisman, A speedy recovery. Morley & Fay Shafron.

SYMPATHY


In honour of Ben Akselrod. Rita Akselrod.

Jonathan & Chloe Lerner, In honour of the yahrzeit of your Uncle Mo. Meda Lerner.

In memory of Sarah Rozenberg-Warm, Rome & Hymie Fox & Family.


Mischa Menzer, On your loss. Ruth Stewart & David Hsu.


Tracy Mammon & Family, On the loss of your husband and father, Tony. Pauline Babins, Nancy Benyaer.


In memory of Ralph James. Arlene James.

Carol Fishman Konkin, In memory of Jim Konkin. Amalia Boe Fishman, Kris & Family.


Shayne May, On the loss of your Mother. Al Szajman, Robert Haber.


MAZEL TOV


Sherri Levinson, On your 60th Birthday. Ron and Roni Wosk.


THANK YOU
Robbie Waisman, Thank you. Kit Krieger.

Evelyn Kahn, Thank you. Maggie Yonash.

To send a tribute card call 604.264.0499 or go online www.vhec.or/support-us/donate
Are you looking for that perfect gift for someone special?

Donating books or funds to acquire books for the library is an excellent way to honour family and friends, and to celebrate special occasions. Books donated to the library can be dedicated with nameplates in the books, acknowledging the donor and the honouree.

Some of the items currently on our wish list include:

- **Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry: Essays on the History and Meanings of Yizker Volumes** (EDITED BY ROSEMARY HOROWITZ)
- **Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction, 3rd edition** (BY ADAM JONES)
- **The Cut Out Girl: A Story of War and Family, Lost and Found** (BY BART VAN ES)
- **Deaf People in Hitler’s Europe** (EDITED BY DONNA F. RYAN & JOHN S. SCHUCHMAN)
- **The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust** (BY JEFFREY HERF)
- **By Chance Alone: A Remarkable True Story of Courage and Survival at Auschwitz** (BY MAX EISEN)
- **Keeping the Promise: A Torah’s Journey** (BY TAMI LEHMAN-WILZIG)
- **Yiddish Glory: The Lost Songs of World War II** (AUDIO CD, SIX DEGREES RECORDS)
- **Shtetl** (DVD, DIRECTED BY MARIAN MARZYNSKI)

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