

FROM THE UN

HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY AT THE UN

It has been over 75 years since the brutalities of the Nazi era. Now, a 13 year research program at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum has found that the atrocities were much more widespread than originally thought (NY Times 3/3/13) . It is now estimated that between 15-20 million people died or were imprisoned . Many killing centers, are documented as well as forced labor camps and brothels where women were forced to have sex with German military personnel. It is said that Hitler's plans for genocide was inspired by the Armenian genocide, the first genocide in the 20th Century, where 1-2 million Armenians died.

Every year on 27 Jan. since 2005, the UN commemorates the victims of the Holocaust. It is important to keep this memory alive so as to encourage alertness and to remind the world that any kind of genocide and crimes against humanity are strictly forbidden.

The briefings this year paid tribute not only to the untold stories of the countless brave men and women who risked their lives to save Jews during the holocaust, but this year special honors went to the Danish Jews and non-Jews who helped to save 7000 Jews.

Initially, the German occupation of Denmark seemed lax. The Germans viewed the Danes as fellow Aryans. However, as the progress of the allied armies increased in the Spring of 1943, the Danish people increased their resistance to the occupation. At this point the Germans declared martial law and decided to begin their deportation of Jews. George Ferdinand Duckwitz, a German diplomat, in a dangerous act of courage, leaked the plans to the Danish Social Democratic Party, who shared the information with the Danish resistance and the Jewish community. The Jews fled from their homes. Over the next few weeks Jews were systematically hidden in trucks, buses and even in hearses and transported to coastal areas. From there fisherman helped ferry over 7000 Jews to safety in neutral Sweden.

Each act of bravery can make a difference and is often contagious. Mob psychology can bring an otherwise passive crowd to hateful behavior that

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no individual would ever do on their own. In the Danish rescue, acts of decency and courage created a wave and stimulated positive action.

As a boy of 10 years. my family left Belgium at the very last minute before the Germans invaded. We were aboard the last boat headed for New York. We sailed through the English channel with great trepidation because it was well known that it was mined. Although we were lucky, many others were not. After the war, my father learned what happened to his family in Belgium. He was never the same after that. Some survivors will talk about their experiences, others are unable to. Some survivors lose their faith, in others their faith is even strengthened. It is well documented that the children of survivors feel the lingering effects of their parents trauma, and this can have detrimental effects on family relationships..

At the end of the briefing, an elderly woman was standing alone. She said very softly that she was a survivor. We spoke with her a bit and then asked her how she felt about God. She answered, "I am still struggling with that."

In recent years there is more information being disseminated through Judaic and Holocausts studies in university History departments. We had the good fortune to be able to interview Dr. Dennis Klein, Professor of History at Keane University, specifically Jewish and Holocaust studies, Dr. Klein and a colleague Dr. Keith Nunes have developed a 15 day study delegation for a small group of students to go to Europe where they will start in Berlin. From there they will travel to Warsaw, Jedwabne, Sarajevo, Srebrenica and end in London. The students will explore the origins of genocide, meet with witnesses and survivors and visit key sites.

In closing this piece we want to remind everyone, how important it is to keep these memories of genocide alive to strengthen our determination to prevent future genocides. Bearing witness and individual actions **do** matter.

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