

News from *Remember Us*

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International
developments



Winter
2011

“So long as we live they too shall live, for they are part of us as we remember them”



Remember Us
The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

About Remember Us

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to each child preparing for bar/bat mitzvah: *remember* one specific child who was lost in the Holocaust, and *act* for the good in memory of that child. We provide the names, and suggest ways for young people and their families to express their commitment to memory: dedicating their Torah reading, doing *mitzvot* and *tikkun olam* in the name of the child, lighting *yahrzeit* candles, etc.

Board of Directors

Michael Berenbaum, PhD
Gesher Calmenson, Founder
Ruth Goldberg
Samara Hutman, President
Harry Pelz
Barbara Tobin, MPH

Current Status

Over 16,000 children have received names from Remember Us, in more than 600 congregations in 39 states and 8 countries. Participation is voluntary. There is no charge. The concept has been endorsed by all Jewish denominations.

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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Righteous Conversations: A Teen Initiative

I Will Remember

The Righteous Conversations Project
A Collaboration between Holocaust Survivors & Teens

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Community Responses

I Will Remember: The Righteous Conversations Project

This decade is the final one in which Holocaust survivors and teens will be able to know each other face-to-face. We welcome you to join in this dialogue between the two generations that will forever shape the way we remember.

We hope you will send us your answers to any or all the questions we pose. This is the beginning of an online conversation between survivors and teens. Our hope is to continue this conversation face-to-face in communities around the world. Please join us.

[Why Here, Why Now?](#)
[Who We Are](#)
[Contact Information](#)

[Survivor Questionnaire](#)
[Teen Questionnaire](#)

Nothing gives us more pleasure than to tell our readers that our original concept of remembrance is being embraced, owned, and evolved by participating families. In Los Angeles a committee of teens has formed to sponsor events that bring Holocaust survivors and teens together for what is being called Righteous Conversations. The themes are complex and important: What do the survivors expect from the rising generations? What do the teens want to tell the survivors while they still have the chance? What is the role of Holocaust memory in forming the identities of people who were not there? What role does Holocaust memory have in inspiring empowerment and *tikkun olam*, repair of the world?

From the original seed of an idea, the Righteous Conversations are developing into a program of public events, workshops, and a documentary film. This splendid development is centered around families from Harvard-Westlake School. Remember Us Board President Samara Hutman and her daughter Rebecca Hutman have brought together a group of families to further this work. Some families have a direct connection to the Holocaust experience, and others recognize that, in this decade that will see the passing of the last survivor generation, we have the

opportunity to make a significant step in Judaism through how we shape remembrance. The ad hoc group of teens is being fully supported and encouraged by their mothers and family friends.

Remember Us acknowledges the great work of conceptualization and actualization being done by the adult committee: Cece Feiler, Helen Jacobs-Lepor, Sheryl Sokoloff, Rochel Blachman, and Susan Gotlib. The teens who are spearheading this nascent movement are Rebecca Hutman, Lara Sokoloff, Marissa Lepor, and Jamie Feiler. Remember Us Board Member Michael Berenbaum is advising the committee. Survivors Marie Kaufman and Helen Freeman are sharing their insights, wisdom, and concerns on behalf of the survivor community. Documentarian film maker Jessica Sanders and Harvard-Westlake film department head Cheri Gaulke will mentor the students who will be filming these conversation on behalf of future generations. History teacher Dror Yaron is the faculty sponsor for an event at Harvard-Westlake.

In our Spring 2011 newsletter we plan to report on some of the answers generated in response to the timely, vital questions that these young women and their mothers are engaging on behalf of the Jewish future. ■

Reflections from Israel and Germany

Read the complete series of messages from Israel on the Remember Us website.



Street sign on one corner of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

In Germany, our first stop had a moving personal connection. The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin is bounded on one side by Cora Berliner Strasse. Cora Berliner was the great-aunt of Barbara Tobin, one of the two people who started Remember Us. Barbara's daughter Cora, her namesake, was one of the first children to participate in Remember Us and now, a college student, maintains our data records. The senior Cora was deeply involved in Kindertransport. She chose to stay in Berlin rather than join her family in the United States, and is believed to have died in Bergen-Belsen. Her great-nieces continue, in their own appropriate fashion, the work for which she sacrificed her life.

Often people have commented that we did the trip backwards, that it would have been better to see the Holocaust sites in Germany first and then see the apotheosis



The Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

of Israel. I disagree. For me Israel is truly a miracle, an unprecedented, glorious accomplishment, fulfillment of the promise of millennia, a complex, roiling modern state being built daily by vision, courage, and sacrifice—warm, vulnerable, humorous, tough, alive. Its existence is connected to the German experience, but I'm unwilling to attribute our homeland's rebirth to the crazed history of that century. Our whole story of survival is so much larger. In Germany my understanding of our experienced deepened, and I came away mindful of the ways that, through group trance, madness can masquerade as reasonable behavior. For myself personally, in Israel I learned much more about my grandmother and aunt who were murdered in Lithuania, and I went to Germany feeling more sensitized to the sources of their awful fate. I'm glad I went to Germany reinforced by my delight, appreciation, and esteem for what has been created by our faith and love.



Sachsenhausen, the first concentration and extermination camp.

At Yad Vashem I had an extraordinary experience of being the only person in the Children's Monument, alone with the myriad candles and the quiet voice reading aloud the names. It had the air of a myth—trepidation, awe, inspiration. Something changed from being there alone, a deepen-



First-graders in Jerusalem perform for their parents at a celebration for receiving their first Torah workbook.

ing understanding of our shared individual responsibility. Afterward I jotted down this idea after touring the new museum.

Eating lunch in the café
 Watching the
 Sleek scarred fat coiffed lithe broken
 Jews
 Walking up and down the stairs
 I think: the museum needs
 One more thing,
 Next to the last exhibit
 A MIRROR
 you have to pass by,
 and a sign for each of us to read:
 HINENI, I am here.



The Valley of the Communities at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Expanding Remember Us Participation in Israel and Beyond

An outreach trip to Israel in June 2010 produced the opportunity to establish Remember Us nationwide in Israel. In a land often fractured by disagreement and struggling for unifying ideas, the positive Israeli response to the Remember Us concept was remarkable; it was universally embraced across the spectrum of educational and religious institutions. We attribute the enthusiastic reception to three factors.

- Holocaust remembrance is a national commitment in Israel, and Remember Us is seen as adding a personal layer of meaning and connection on a child-by-child basis.
- The concept is seen by all as an idea on which everyone can agree. Remember Us is recognized as the ritualization of memory without a commitment to any one particular practice. It is equally evocative for secular Israelis and religious Israeli Jews of all persuasions.
- Remember Us presents this history in a way that levels the differences between ethnicities and backgrounds. While Ashkenazi Jews share the history of the Holocaust, Sephardic, Yemenite, and Ethiopian communities do not have the same personal history of the Holocaust in their family backgrounds.

During the three-week trip, founder Geshar Calmenson met with Israeli educational, civic, government and religious leadership, as well as representatives of international Jewry. The trip opened the door for Remember Us to become an international program embraced by Jews worldwide.



Doorway to Education Ministry, Petach Tiqwa, Israel.

The first step in creating a portal for Israeli participation has been to create the Hebrew name of the project—Zichru Otanu. This Fall we launched a Hebrew website. Individual requests for names to remember from bnai mitzvah families in Israel are now quickly fulfilled online.

The Israeli educational system is another potentially significant partner. We identified vehicles for integrating the Remember Us concept into existing school curricula. The Israeli school system is divided into multiple schemes (which is the Israeli concept for networks). Each has its own unique approach, ranging from curriculum to full architectural solutions that both combine and separate religious education and secular education. Some of these schemes are interested in incorporating Remember Us into their curriculum in sixth and seventh grade programs. Leadership from the Golan School District expressed their

commitment to incorporating Remember Us into the schools in their district, across scheme. An appropriate anchor point in their 7th grades is the Shoreshim (family roots) program. Each student creates a family album. Remember Us may provide a name to be remembered by each student and included in the Shoreshim family album. Translating bios provided in English into Hebrew will be a curricular activity.

In addition to the Israel focus of the trip, we had the

opportunity to bring the Remember Us concept to the international leadership of Masorti Olami, which serves the Conservative Movement worldwide, and World Union for Progressive Judaism, serving the same function for the Reform movement outside of Israel and America. Remember Us affirmed its commitment to support their efforts to bring the Remember Us concept to their international constituencies. A Spanish-language version of the web site will be implemented this coming Spring.

The trip was generously funded by an Upstart Bay Area mini-grant and private donations. ■

Introducing ITS, the International Tracing Service in Germany

In a very small village in Germany there is a remarkable institution that has worked for sixty years to shed light on the individual fates of those caught up in the Holocaust. We are honored to introduce you to one of our partner organizations, the International Tracing Service (ITS).

In its mission statement, ITS declares its commitment to serve the victims of Nazi persecution and their families by documenting and evaluating the fate of the victims and maintaining this information in its archives. The archive's collections are unique in scope and significance. ITS is responsible for preserving historical records, processing tracing requests and making the archive accessible for historical research. Through the dedicated help of ITS staff, these records still help to shed light on the fate of many. The staff of the International Tracing Service support research and offer comprehensive help to visitors who wish to work with our archives.

At the end of World War 2, Nazi archives were collected in the Allied Zones of Germany and placed in a central repository, administered by the International Red Cross. (A similar cache was also created by the Soviets.) In the last 60 years over 50 million documents have been digitized and

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Web Enhancements Make Ordering, Research Easier

Enhancements to the Remember Us website (www.remember-us.org) include a comprehensive “Ideas” page, online request form, and order forms to increase program access, streamline communications, and provide valuable resources to student participants, their families, clergy and educators.

The revised and updated “Ideas” page includes a range of options for honoring a remembered child. Age-appropriate links related to the Holocaust and options for further research about the remembered child provide additional opportunities for

deepening understanding. Participants can now find national and local resources related to Holocaust education, information on how to do online research on specific names, as well as hear personal testimonies. To encourage participants to use memory as a catalyst for positive action in today’s world, the website includes resources for identifying mitzvah projects. Opportunities and suggestions for continuing post-bnai mitzvah involvement in Holocaust memory are also available.

The new online order forms are intended to streamline individual and

congregation requests for program materials. Participants can individually request a name to remember and/or register a name they have received from their congregation, as well as order personalized materials including certificates and pamphlets to share with their guests. Congregations can register to participate in Remember Us or order materials to distribute to their bnai mitzvah.

A secure online donation option is available. All Remember Us services are offered free of charge and we depend on voluntary gifts from participating families. ■

New Participating Communities

Remember Us welcomes the following communities at which the Remember Us Project is made available to bar/bat mitzvah students. May they go from strength to strength.

Australia

Sydney
Chabad House

Canada

Quebec

Cote St. Luc
Beth Zion Congregation

Ontario

London
Temple Israel of London
Ottawa
Or Hanesamah

Nova Scotia

Halifax
Shaar Shalom
Congregation

Israel

Modiin
Kehillat Yozma
Ra'anana
Ra'anana Masorti
Synagogue
Tel Aviv
Kehillat Beit Tefilah
Israeli

Mexico

Tecamachalco, Mexico City
Comunidad Sefardi

South Africa

Johannesburg
Greenside Hebrew
Congregation

United Kingdom

Stanmore
Stanmore and Cannons
Park United
Synagogue

United States of America

Arizona

Tempe
Temple Emanuel

California

Camarillo
Temple Ner Ami
Chatsworth
Chabad of Chatsworth
Hermosa Beach
Temple Shalom of the
South Bay
Los Angeles
Steven S. Wise Temple
University Synagogue
Northridge
Temple Ahavat Shalom
Palm Desert
Temple Sinai
San Francisco
Or Shalom Jewish
Community

Tustin
Congregation B'nai
Israel

Valley Village
Temple Beth Hillel

Walnut Creek
Congregation B'nai
Tikvah

Riverside
Temple Beth El

Connecticut

Putnam
Congregation B'nai
Shalom

Florida

Jacksonville
Beth Shalom
Congregation

Georgia

Norcross
Chabad Enrichment
Center of Gwinnett

Illinois

Northbrook
Temple Beth-El
Northfield
Am Yisrael

Maryland

Bethesda
Beth Chai Congregation
Congregation Beth El of
Montgomery County

Fulton
Temple Isaiah Fulton

Kensington
Temple Emanuel

Pikesville
Chizuk Amuno
Congregation

Massachusetts

Amherst
Jewish Community of
Amherst MA

Brookline
Young Israel of
Brookline MA

Cambridge

Congregation Etz
Chayim
Kahal B'raira

Sharon
Congregation Klal
Yisrael

Temple Sinai
Westborough
Congregation B'nai
Shalom

Belmont
Beth El Temple Center

New Jersey

Cherry Hill
Temple Beth Shalom

Closter
Congregation Sha'ar
Flemington
Or Chadash Temple

River Edge
Temple Avodat Shalom

New York

Riverdale
Congregation Tehillah
Brooklyn
Madison Jewish Center

Plainview
Temple Chaverim

Suffern
Chabad of Suffern

Syosset
Northshore Synagogue

Tarrytown
Temple Beth Abraham

Ohio

Hudson
Temple Beth Shalom
Sandusky
Oheb Shalom Temple
Solon
Congregation Kol
Chadash

Pennsylvania

Brookmann
Congregation Beth El-
Ner Tamid
Easton
Beit Simcha
New Hope
Kehilat Hanahar
Newtown
Congregation Brothers
of Israel

Rhode Island

Barrington
Temple Habonim

South Carolina

Charleston
Synagogue Emanuel

Texas

Beaumont
Temple Emanuel

Virginia

Virginia Beach
Temple Emanuel

Wisconsin

Mequon
Congregation Shir
Hadash

Wisconsin Initiative Creates Local Remember Us Council

Spurred by the enthusiastic response to the Remember Us Wisconsin Initiative, and its 50+ participants in the first 3 years, the Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center (HERC) has created a local Remember Us Project Council. Chaired by Remember Us participant Hilary Miller and her mother, Felicia Miller, and staffed by Bonnie Shafrin, HERC Director, the Council serves a dual purpose.

The first is to have RU students serve as the liaisons to the synagogues and schools on behalf of RU in order to educate pre-bar/bat mitzvah students about RU and to promote the program by sharing their own positive experiences. The second purpose is to create programs to enhance the experiences of the Remember Us students. The Council, easily replicated in other communities, can serve as a model for both marketing the program and providing post-bnai mitzvah opportunities for students and their families.

The initial meeting of the RU Council was attended by past participants and their parents representing three synagogues. The discussion focused on ways to “get the word out and create a buzz” in order to increase participation among Jewish students. Among the suggestions offered to accomplish this were 1) to have students who have already participated in RU act as ambassadors to speak to younger students at the synagogues and Jewish schools could be an effective tool, 2) to have both students and parents speak to bar/bat mitzvah class or group meetings where both students and their parents’ were present since most young people might choose to participate in RU with parent support and encouragement, and 3) a program/speaker for the Middle School students at the Milwaukee Jewish Day School to present RU as an opportunity for a mitzvah project. Facebook was also considered a mechanism to reach out to students.

Hannah Sprung and Hilary Miller, both 8th grade students at MJDS expressed that participating in RU in 7th grade made studying about the Holocaust more meaningful in 8th grade. Hilary spoke about visualizing what her RU child (Lina Gerson z”l) went through as they learned about aspects of the Holocaust. Hannah also stated that she felt that all students should participate in ancestry-related projects because when many of her classmates

did this, they discovered that many had family members who were affected by the Holocaust.

The second focus of the discussion was on developing special programs for Remember Us students. Among the suggestions were a trip to the new Illinois Holocaust Museum. Another suggestion was to create an art project that each RU participant could choose to take part in. The form for this might be the creation of a quilt square or a ceramic tile that would feature the name of the child remembered, the bar/bat mitzvah student and maybe the date of the bar/bat mitzvah. These could be displayed somewhere in the community. Another idea was to have each synagogue also do their own project each year, for instance, a sign board that would include each bar/bat mitzvah student and who they remembered. One parent noted the effectiveness of the empty chair, set aside at her son’s bar mitzvah. It could be possible for students to create chairs for this purpose at each synagogue.

The final agenda item that the Council discussed was mechanism for encouraging RU participation in the community Yom HaShoah commemoration. Among the opportunities for involvement considered by the overall community, Yom Hashoah areas are to have RU students serve as mentors for younger students attending the special inter-generational program that will be part of the local Yom Hashoah commemoration, and to be included in the candle lighting service at Yom Hashoah. To increase participation, the Council recommended personal follow-up to the formal letter of invitation that is sent to all RU participants.

The Council is currently working on a series of next steps, which include talking points to be written to provide a framework for RU students speaking to bar/bat mitzvah students at synagogues and schools, a mission statement for the Wisconsin Remember Us Project Council created with input from students and adults, and a Facebook page for the Wisconsin Initiative. ■

International Tracing Service

Continued from page 3

cross-indexed. A researcher can instantly find anyone mentioned in the records, which include transports, forced labor camps, and ghettos. The archive has been invaluable in connecting people and also in establishing documentation for claims and reparations. The entire cost is borne by the German government.

“We are deeply moved by the important work being done here,” said Cynthia Calmenson. “It cannot be an easy task to engage that level of human suffering day after day.” As children do research on the lost children, they often raise questions about their own family history, reports Calmenson. “This promotes dialogue between generations and at the same time the healing process in families which were themselves affected.” ITS has pledged its future support for the Remember Us project, thereby offering its help to young people researching a lost child’s background and persecution history.

The Remember Us team visited the staff of International Tracing Service in July to view personally view the holdings and work with the ITS staff on remembrance issues of mutual interest. We recommend this visit to any one who will be in western Germany, they are warm and dedicated people doing remarkable work. ■



Children's records at ITS.

Our Sincere Thanks to These Supporters of the Remember Us Project

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