

Kingston Upon Thames, Holocaust Memorial Day 2010

Key note address:

'We are all responsible for creating a legacy of Hope'- Kay Andrews,.

Firstly thank you to the Mayor and the Inter faith group here in Kingston for inviting me to provide reflection on Holocaust Memorial Day. I come from the somewhat unusual position of working in Holocaust education full time and so I hope you will bear with me as I use this afternoon to consider the challenges we all face in learning about the Holocaust as well as what the 'legacy of hope' maybe.

HMD raises many questions for me— how does a national HMD improve our understanding of the events of the Holocaust? How do we reflect the legacy of the Holocaust in our everyday lives? How can we move away from the hollow phrases of 'never again' when genocide *still* happens?

Should we also consider what we mean by 'Holocaust Memorial Day'? After all the term Holocaust specifically refers to the attempted annihilation of every Jew, whilst others suffered persecution and genocide. But then perhaps renaming it: '*Holocaust and others who were persecuted and marked for genocide under the Nazi Regime - Memorial Day*' is neither snappy nor easy to remember, so maybe the short hand is better. Of course in making such distinctions about Nazi policy I should be clear that I am not creating a hierarchy of suffering, quite simply: a child who is murdered, is a

murdered child regardless of whether they were killed for being Jewish or Polish or Roma or disabled.

HMD is a combination of education, history, memory, and contemporary issues, all wrapped up together - and perhaps we can only truly have a legacy of hope when we unravel the different strands?

So that is my slightly thought provoking introduction, which I hope has begun to raise questions in your mind – because after all if we can't be reflective on a day like today, then when can we be?!

Education and academic research are at the forefront of understanding of the Holocaust. Here in England (this doesn't apply to Scotland, Wales or NI) the Holocaust has been a mandatory part of the secondary History National Curriculum since 1991. We have a whole generation of English school children who have learnt something of the Holocaust.

We know that many others choose to teach about the Holocaust – notably through Religious Education and English.

I can make these claims with absolute certainty as in September the first national piece of published Holocaust education was released, (by the team that I am part of at the Institute of Education).

The survey demonstrates a huge amount of commitment from teachers – to begin with over 2100 answered the survey online, giving their time and comment freely, 68 were interviewed face to face.

85% agreed that it is important the Holocaust is on the national curriculum, and 95% felt it was important that it should always be taught about. Without a doubt it is good to know that the professionals recognize the importance of teaching about this paradigmatic genocide and this provides us with hope.

The fact is the Holocaust is on the curriculum, it is here to stay, but more of a challenge and hope, on my part, is that we are able to equip our teachers with the tools they need to deliver effective lessons relating to the Holocaust.

Teaching about the Holocaust is complex. To understand the Holocaust, we need our students to realize the complexity of history – the big picture, whilst at the same time understanding the individual stories of people – as Prof Yehuda Bauer puts it (far more succinctly than me) it is about text and context. For instance we need our students to spend more time understanding Jewish people and their lives and communities before World War II, so they are able to reflect on the empty space that has been left behind.

History is complex and none of this can be achieved in a single day, it takes a skilled teacher to create a learning environment where our young people feel empowered and engaged and able to learn.

One such exemplary teacher was Janusz Korczak, who expounded a philosophy of education that we can all aspire to. Korczak wrote extensively about children and education, his writings form the basis of the UNESCO's Rights of the Child, now in place for 20 years, and much of his groundbreaking reflections on children have been brought into educational practice across the globe.

You may be wondering why I have chosen this one educator. Well, Korczak was Polish and before World War II was a well known personality on Polish radio, where he spoke about parenting, amongst other things, he was also responsible for two orphanages in Warsaw – one Catholic and one Jewish. After the creation of the Warsaw ghetto, the

Jewish orphanage, with 200 children, was inside the ghetto walls. Korczak moved into the ghetto orphanage, and ran it with the same democratic principles he had been advocating for many years.

As the Nazis sent the inhabitants of the ghetto to their deaths at the Treblinka death camp some urged Korczak to leave the ghetto and go into hiding. He refused, choosing to stay with his children until the end, when he led them through the ghetto streets to their deportation to Treblinka where they perished.

Why was Korczak deported in such a way – after all what harm had this man done? Quite simply he was deported because he was Jewish.

In a story such as this, what legacy of hope can we find? Of course we can comment on Korczak's personal actions during a time of genocide, but perhaps we should also be considering the longer, enduring legacy of Korczak's writings and his educational philosophy if we were able to apply his teachings throughout education today we would truly have a legacy of hope.

The story of Korczak was told by many who survived the ghetto and that brings me to reflecting on the incredible community of survivors we have here in the UK and the role they play in the legacy of the Holocaust.

Over the past 10 years I have been privileged to hear many survivors' testimonies and to learn much from them. I hope they won't mind me saying they are a diverse group, all with unique testimonies to tell. They have all reacted to their experiences in different ways - Some are able to give their testimony without anger or blame, others are unable to speak publically about their experiences, some express a tremendous sense of purpose and duty in speaking of their experiences, others speak of anger and hurt aimed at those who did not help when they might have.

When we speak of survivors and their experiences it is important to remember the struggle that many of them faced after liberation. How they had to rebuild their lives, often without family, friends or the normal structures that we expect in life.

It is difficult to pick just one to speak of here, but time is short so I will mention just one— Leon Greenman, a British born man, who by various twists of fate found himself, his wife, Els, and two year son, Barne, on their way to Auschwitz –Birkenau. Els and Barney were murdered on arrival, and Leon was haunted for years to come by the last time he saw them disappearing off in a lorry towards the gas chamber. Leon, though, did survive and eventually made his way back to the UK , each step of the way was difficult, he travelled huge distances, he was hospitalized, had no money, no work *and he had lost Els and Barney*. He had to tell his mother-in-law that her daughter and grandchild had been murdered and somehow he had to find a living - this is no tale of happy ever after, but one of tenacity, loneliness and hard work.

It is difficult to find any 'legacy of hope' Leon felt strongly that certain individuals were responsible for his family being sent to Auchwitz, he expressed bitterness and anger and in all honesty I am not sure I would of behaved differently in such a situation.

Incredibly, he began giving his testimony less than a year after he was liberated, and continued to do this until he died, a sense of duty and the need to tell of what man is capable of. Even after the Holocaust Leon received threatening letters from the far right, in the UK, had bricks thrown through his windows and lived a solitary life, but all I can say is that Leon and his testimony did impact on many, and since his death we have come across letters that were sent to him by school students, teachers and others who felt the need to write after hearing his testimony. Undoubtedly many of these people will remember this man, and the eyewitness testimony he gave, and for others it touched something else within.

Again my point is that hope and legacy are not always the obvious warm stories we hear, they can be difficult and painful experiences, but it is often these hard events that encourage us to reflect and act, and engage in a legacy of hope.

I mentioned that many remember Leon, and this is an important part of Holocaust Memorial Day – *the need to remember*. For our survivors this is exceptionally personal, remembering family, friends and communities.

I could of stood here and simply read hundreds of names, those who died during the Holocaust, and those who died at the hands of Nazi persecution: people like Ossi Stojka – he was the youngest of 6 children, his family had lived in Austria for more than 200 years. Ossi was 7 when he died at Auschwitz-Birkenau, denied medical treatment and interned there as he was a Roma or gypsy child.

Or Father Piotr Sosnowski – shot in 1939 a Catholic Polish priest one of 1.8 million Christian Poles murdered as part of a genocide against Polish people,

or Helene Gotthold, a German nurse and mother, who was tortured and later guillotined by the Nazis in 1944 because as a Jehovah's Witness the Nazis saw her a threat to their ideology.

or Robert Obermann a German who was interned in Dachau concentration camp – he died there in 1941 and was imprisoned because he was gay.

or Xaver Franz Stuetzinger, who also died in Dachau his so called crime being a member of the Communist party.

or Helene Lebel a Catholic from Austria who was murdered in Germany as she suffered from a mental illness.

So why mention these people who all died as a direct result of Nazi persecution when this year's HMD theme is 'legacy of hope'? One reason is that without remembering each individual person and the reason why they were persecuted there can be no true legacy and no real understanding and no real hope. We should remember these

individuals for their own sake, but surely the legacy is to understand how and why these events happened, only then can we begin to put in place strategy and process to try and prevent such atrocities happening in the future.

65 years after the events of the Holocaust we live in a Europe with void at its core. Centuries and indeed millennia old, Jewish communities no longer exist – think about Kingston and what community means here - the buildings and institutions, the music and culture, the traditions and changes, the houses and flats, shops and roads – each of these being wrapped up in people children, teenagers, adults, older people – quite simply people like you and I.

Now consider the Greek Island of Rhodes – a place that many of us visit on holidays, a beautiful Mediterranean Island, a fun place to be – but how many of us have noticed what is missing? How many of us realize that we are witnessing, what a colleague in Sweden calls, 'the creative act of genocide'?

In 1939 there had been a Jewish community on Rhodes for approx 2000 years. and as we stand in the heart of Rhodes today, or other countless towns and cities across Europe, I wonder how many of us think about what we don't see?

Think carefully... what is missing are the generations of the Jewish communities who should have been born *after* the Holocaust – imagine the millions of descendents who would of populated communities, and the contribution they would of made to global society World acclaimed scientists, or musicians, or engineers, or quite simply families who lived on the bread line dealing with the ups and downs of life as many of us do.

This void is part of the legacy we all face - We can not bring the dead back to life, but we can ensure that the contribution made to society by Jewish communities across Europe is marked, respected and not forgotten and by taking on this legacy, such

learning will lead to understanding and respect and perhaps, *just perhaps*, help prevent attacks on buildings belonging to the former communities.

The legacy of the Holocaust extends further than the void we see across Europe, as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum reflects 'in the light of the moral failures that allowed the Holocaust to happen:

Nations pledged to prevent and punish the crime of genocide

Criminal trials established that government officials who commit crimes against humanity could be held accountable by international tribunals

International protection of human rights expanded –

The idea of informed consent influenced ethical approaches to medical experimentation on human beings

Protections for refugees were broadened

The movement towards reconciliation between Christians and Jews advanced

The idea of a Jewish homeland gained urgency '

Of course with all these points of legacy we could argue and debate the success or failure of each – however our legacy of hope for today should be the continuing work that is needed to move forwards on all of these points in a positive and meaningful way and to recognize that the Holocaust has in some ways provided a legacy of hope for to build upon.

The legacy of the Holocaust is wound up in so many different elements I would like to end by once more considering the survivors and share with you a very short story written by Ida Fink.

The focus is a Jewish community after liberation and it is called The Tenth Man. The title is pertinent as within Orthodox Judaism a service cannot take place without 10 adult men; this is known as a minyan.

The Tenth Man - Ida Fink

The first to come back was Chaim the carpenter. He turned up one evening from the direction of the river and the woods; no one knew where he had been or with whom. Those who saw him walking along the riverbank didn't recognize him at first. How could they? He used to be tall and broad-shouldered; now he was shrunken and withered, his clothes were ragged, and, most important, he had no face. It was completely overgrown with a matted black thicket of hair. It is hard to say how they recognized him. They watched him from above, from the cliff above the river, watched him plod along until, nearing the first houses of the lower town, he stopped and began to sing. First they thought he had gone mad, but then one of the smarter ones guessed that it was not a song, but a Jewish prayer with a plaintive melody, like the songs that could be heard on Friday evenings in the old days, coming from the hundred-year-old synagogue, which the Germans had burn down. The Synagogue was in the lower town; the whole lower town had always been Jewish – before the Germans came and during the occupation – and no one knew what it would be like, now that the Jews were gone. Chaim the carpenter was the first to come back.

A dark cloud from the burnt-out fire still lingered over the town, the stench still hung in the air, and gray clouds floated over the marketplace the Germans had burned.

In the evening, when the news had spread, a crowd gathered in front of Chaim's house. Some came to welcome him, others to watch, still others to see if it was true that someone had survived. The carpenter was sitting on the front steps in front of his house; the door of the house was nailed shut. He didn't respond to questions or greetings. Later, people said that his eyes had glittered emptily in the forest of his face, as if he were blind. He sat and stared straight ahead. A woman placed a bowl of potatoes in front of him, and in the morning she took it away untouched.

Four days later the next one came back. He was a tenant on a neighboring farm and had survived in the forest with the help of the farm manager. The manager brought the tenant back by wagon, in broad daylight. The old man was propped up, half reclining, on bundles of straw. His face, unlike the carpenter's, was as white as a communion wafer, which struck everyone as strange for a man who had lived so long in the open.

When the tenant got down from the wagon he swayed and fell face down on the ground, which people ascribed more to emotion than to weakness. In fact, it was possible to think he was kissing the threshold of his house, thanking God for saving him. The manager helped him up, and supporting him on his arm, led him into the entrance hall.

A week passed and no more came back.. The stench of burnt objects faded into the wind and the days became clear. Spring blossomed suddenly as befitted the first spring of freedom.

Ten days later three more men came back; a dry goods merchant and two grain dealers. The arrival of the merchant upset the conjectures and calculations, since everyone knew that he had been taken away to the place from which there was no return. He looked just as he had before the war; he might even have put on some weight. When questioned, he smiled and explained patiently that he had jumped out of a transport to Belzec and hidden in a village. Who had hidden him, and in what village, he didn't want to say. He had the same smile on his face that he used to have before the war when he stood behind his counter. That smile never left his face, and it astonished everyone, because no one from this man's family had survived.

For three days the grain dealers slept like logs. They lay on the floor near their door, which was left slightly ajar, as if sleep had felled them the moment they walked in. Their high-topped boots were caked with dried mud, their faces were swollen. The neighbours heard them screaming in their sleep at night.

The grain dealers were still asleep when the first woman returned. No one recognized her. Only when she reached the teacher's house and burst out sobbing did they understand that she was his wife. Even then, they didn't recognize her, so convincing was her beggar woman's disguise. She had begged in front of Catholic and Orthodox churches, had wandered from church fair to church fair and market to market, reading people's palms. Those were her hiding places. From beneath her plaid kerchief peered the drawn face of a peasant woman.

They asked in amazement: "Is it you?"

"It's me," she answered in her low voice. Only her voice was unchanged.

So there were six of them.

A wagon brought the doctor back. He had lain for nine months in a hole underneath the cowshed of one of his patients, a peasant woman. He was still unable to walk. The accountant and his son and the barber and his wife returned from a bunker in the forest. The barber, who had once been known for his mane of red hair, was bald as a bowling ball.

Every day at dusk, the dry goods merchant left his house and walked towards the railway station. When asked where he was going, he explained, "My wife is coming back today." The trains were still not running.

The farmer, a pious man, spent more and more time by his window; he would stand there for hours on end. He was looking for a tenth man, so that the prayers for the murdered might be said as soon as possible in the ruins of the synagogue.

The days kept passing, fragrant and bright. The trains began to run. The people in the town no longer conjectured and calculated. The farmer's face, white as a communion wafer, shone less often in his window.

Only the dry goods merchant – he never stopped haunting the railway station. He would stand there patiently, smiling. After a while, no one noticed him anymore.

I feel this is a powerful story, and it raises the question of what message can we take from it? Misery and gloom? Failure and giving up?

Or perhaps hidden is a story of hope. Hope relies on small things to make change and move forwards, hope can come from individuals, or communities. The legacy we have is passed, in part by the survivors of the Holocaust and Nazi crimes, the farmer in this story had hope that the 10th man would come, the dry good merchant still had hope everyday for the return of his wife, and was ignored by others, what must it have taken for survivors to move forward in their lives and have any kind of hope?

As our survivor generation becomes older I think the message of this short story and of Holocaust Memorial Day is simple - survivors have born much of the legacy of the Holocaust and all it entails. It is now down to us, as the teachers, educators, parents and young people to communicate the story of the Holocaust to the generations to come and in our own ways work towards a true legacy of hope.

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'The Tenth Man' by Ida Fink can be found on the Yad Vashem website www.yadvashem.org.il