

THC Launches "Living On" Exhibit

Even before the shutter's first click, Rob Heller envisioned the parameters for his visual portraits of Holocaust survivors who live in Tennessee: shooting in black and white and zooming in on subjects' faces, to capture their essence and, simultaneously, avoid background clutter.

Dawn Weiss Montgomery took responsibility for arranging the shoots, devised questionnaires for the subjects, coordinated and conducted the interviews, then wrote concise textual portraits on each.

Neither was prepared for the emotional challenges of their assignments.

The Tennessee Holocaust Commission-sponsored exhibition, titled *Living On: Portraits of Tennessee Survivors and Liberators*, melded the skills of photographer and writer to produce a collection of more than 80 images. A sampling of these images will be previewed at Tennessee's Days of Remembrance ceremony in the Capitol in Nashville on April 20.

Living On is the centerpiece of THC's commemoration of its 20th year, said Felicia Anchor, the Commission's chair.

THC, she said, "was challenged by the question of 'How does one come face to face with history,' because the number of survivors who settled in Tennessee was small and geographic distance was great. The *Living On* project, created and developed by the Commission, is our way of perpetuating face-to-face contact with survivors and liberators who were there and saw it all.

"The faces we see in the exhibit are a portal to lost lives, deep pain and sometimes miracles. When the eyewitnesses can no longer tell their stories, the exhibit will continue to serve as their voices in

small towns and cities throughout Tennessee for generations to come."

Montgomery located her subjects by searching THC data bases with Ruth Tanner, THC executive director; talking with survivors; contacting synagogues, Jewish federations and JCCs; and placing advertisements in newspapers. Articles that followed press releases also produced leads.

PBS affiliate will fund a documentary about the development of the exhibit.

Montgomery spoke of being overwhelmed at times by the intense emotions she experienced while conducting the interviews. Heller was touched by great feelings as he heard survivors "baring their souls." Both emerged from the assignments injected with a spirit of



Dawn Weiss Montgomery, interviewer, and Rob Heller, photographer, flank Will Pedigo, Living On videographer.

Heller and Montgomery met their subjects during two major trips around Tennessee last summer. Nearly all their meetings were held in private rooms in Jewish community centers and synagogues, while some were done at a retirement community. Among the subjects were five American soldiers who had helped to liberate concentration camps. Two Holocaust survivors passed away before their scheduled appointments with Heller and Montgomery.

Will Pedigo, Heller's former student, videotaped a behind-the-scenes look at the process that became *Living On*. Nashville's

honor and purpose in being near those who related powerful stories. It took only one day of interviews to strip from them the veneer of craftsman and artist.

That day, in Chattanooga, Wallace Carden, a soldier who had survived the Berga camp (see accompanying article), kissed Montgomery on each cheek, both cried and he left. Carden was the last of nine interviews conducted that day.

"He left, and I slumped on the chair and burst into tears. I'm the professional, but I was so moved after 12 hours," said Montgomery, who had been a staff writer for the *Jewish Observer* in Nashville and a writer and producer of country music videos and documentaries during her decade-long residence here.

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Tennessee Holocaust Commission Marks 20th Anniversary!

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Chair's Column

Dear Friends,

It is with great pleasure that I ask you to celebrate with us the 20th anniversary of our Tennessee Holocaust Commission.

Twenty years ago the dreams of a few inspired the creation of a Commission that today is a well respected and internationally recognized institution of learning and outreach.

We are grateful to four governors, who provided unwavering support of our work. We are grateful to our state legislature, which has provided essential funding to conduct our programs and participated in our annual Days of Remembrance at the State Capitol. We recognize the thousands of educators and the public who have attended our statewide workshops and programs.

Our commissioners and staff, past and present, are due a tremendous note of appreciation for their unswerving dedication to our work.

For two decades we have remained committed to fulfilling our mission: to commemorate the lessons of the Holocaust by educating Tennesseans that prejudice, hatred and violence manifested in the Holocaust always leads to the destruction of a humane society.

Your continued support of our mission is essential. With your help, we will work together so that the history and lessons of the Holocaust remain an essential beacon that will shine not only today but for generations yet to come.

With best wishes,
Felicia Anchor
Chair, Tennessee Holocaust Commission



Felicia Anchor, chair (left), and Gilya G. Schmidt, a commissioner from East Tennessee, display a certificate of appreciation Schmidt presented to the Board of Directors on behalf of The Fern and Manfred Steinfeld Program in Judaic Studies at the University of Tennessee.



**Jack and Marilyn Belz
Honored by Yad Vashem**

Yad Vashem recently bestowed its Remembrance Award on Jack and Marilyn Belz (above), Memphis residents. Jack Belz is a founding

member of THC's Board of Directors, appointed by then governor Lamar Alexander 20 years ago. At a gala dinner in New York in November, the Belzes were honored for their commitment to Holocaust education. Among the many Jewish causes they have endowed is the library floor of Yad Vashem's Archives and Library building, in 2000. At the ceremony, Belz said that Yad Vashem "has been entrusted with documenting the history of the Jewish people and the Holocaust period, preserving the memory and story of each of the six million victims, and imparting the legacy of the Holocaust for generations to come through its archives, library, educational facilities, museums; and, as well, entrusted with the recognition of those referred to as the "Righteous Among Nations," those who risked their lives to save Jews."

[*Living On* - continued from page 1]

"I cried for every mother, every bit of starvation. It was the first time in my career that I was totally invested. I crawled into bed with my eight-year-old daughter and curled up with her for all the mothers who couldn't. I was honored to share in their stories. We made sure they were treated lovingly and respectfully."

Montgomery asked what she called "basic" questions: How did you survive, did you pray, how did you fall asleep at night? An interview typically lasted 90 minutes. The last quarter hour Montgomery reserved to talk about the person's grandchildren and lives in Tennessee, to avoid "just opening old wounds and sending them back home," she said.

The interviewer-interviewee relationship was "gone in three minutes because of the nature of what we were discussing," Montgomery said. "Sometimes it was [more] one Jew talking to another,

one mother to another. We became that relationship. It would be impossible to have that kind of relationship and not be affected."

Heller, who teaches photojournalism and graphic design at the University of Tennessee, was somewhat better prepared for the project, having photographed more than 200 Holocaust survivors while living in Miami in the 1980s. Still, he said, "We had days when, from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., we hadn't been able to catch our breaths, it was so emotional.

"One woman, in Nashville, told of having had to give up her child, and she'd heard that a Nazi officer tossed the child into a fire. I looked at Dawn, Dawn looked at me, and we bit our lips and tried to continue."

Montgomery added: "It was more than just a series of interviews and photographs for all of us. It always will be."

Heller preferred to photograph each subject after Montgomery finished her

interview. Listening to the conversation was "emotionally demanding and exhausting, but rewarding," he said. But the words and expressions fused into an image of the kind of portrait he wanted to capture for each person.

Inevitably, Heller knew immediately that he'd gotten the look on film that he wanted—the expression was "right there, and I knew right away that I had it," he said. Using his Hasselblad medium-format camera, Heller took no more than 12 exposures for any subject. "I got something powerful from everyone," he said.

"The definition of a strong portrait is one that, if you look at them long enough, you can see into their soul. I think that I've been successful at getting it. I think that the real judge of that are the people who will look at the photographs."

Summer Institute to Train Teachers on Holocaust Education

The Tennessee Holocaust Commission will inaugurate a Summer Institute at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU) in Murfreesboro. Planned for June 9-11, its cost to first-time participants is \$50.

The MTSU institute offers an introductory seminar for middle and high school teachers in all disciplines. It will be open to teachers who are new to teaching the Holocaust, or even those who teach the Holocaust already but wish to enhance their knowledge and learn new information and methods, said Paul Fleming, assistant principal of Nashville's Martin Luther King High School, who is chairing the seminar's planning committee.

The seminar "will be an opportunity for teachers to deepen their own content knowledge of the Holocaust, and learn how to present this unique history to students," he said.

THC has publicized the program in a variety of forums, including at the state's social studies conference, which was held in March in Memphis.

THC hopes to attract 15-20 participants because it wants "to start it small, to allow for in-depth learning and conversation," said Fleming.

Ultimately, the MTSU experience will represent the initial step in a three-tiered continuing education process that THC sponsors. It will be followed by the now-annual summer seminar at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington for teachers at an intermediate level, then by a travel seminar in Eastern

Europe for teachers at an advanced level. The first travel seminar is projected to take place in 2005.

The MTSU seminar will include a two-part session on the historical background of the Holocaust, three one-hour interdisciplinary workshops, a session on utilizing Web sites to learn about the Holocaust and a discussion on teaching the Holocaust through film, Fleming said.

THC'S RESOURCE CATALOG IS ONLINE AT

www.tennesseeholocaustcommission.org.

The materials in the catalog are available for teachers and faculty in Tennessee to borrow without charge. The service to borrowers is free, except for return mail and possible late fees.

Contact Stacey Knight, THC's administrative assistant,
with requests at

(615) 343-1171 or by e-mail, stacey.l.knight@vanderbilt.edu

Consortium Creates Unique Adult Program

Rochelle Cox-Negusu teaches her adult students to utilize technology and their own creativity to create slide show presentations. The overwhelming portion of the 180-hour, four-month course, deals with the mechanics, research methods and media used in developing the slide shows.

But Cox-Negusu injects plenty of history, including Holocaust history. And her students in the GED extension class are captives to her words, literally so. They are inmates at Memphis's Federal Correction Institution.

They produce impressive work, Cox-Negusu reports, displaying imagination, sensitivity and fresh perspectives on the material. And she has the Tennessee Holocaust Commission and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) to thank for this component of the program.

The Holocaust research materials that the students use—booklets, pamphlets, essays, research papers, reproduced ID cards, pictures and biographical data of victims—all are laid out on a display table in the center of the room and are accessible.

Throughout the state, the *Lessons from the Holocaust* textbook, known informally as the "toolkit"—which THC first developed with the University of Tennessee's Center for Literacy Studies (CLS) in 1998—supplies the resources that adult education teachers need to include discussions of the Holocaust in their classes. Today, this unique program is a result of the collaboration of CLS, THC, USHMM and Tennessee's Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the division of state government responsible for adult education.

Cox-Negusu is a member of the state's second class of adult education teachers trained in offering Holocaust studies. THC sponsors the program with CLS, which recruits the teachers and supervises instruction. Another sponsor is the USHMM.

Teachers utilizing the resource materials include those who are brand new to Holocaust education and see the value of opening discussions on such

themes as evil, tolerance and morality in classes that ostensibly tackle technical skills, grammar and mathematics.

Integrating Holocaust history into the curricula "has proven to be the most effective tool" for teaching diversity to the adult students, said Marva Doremus, assistant director of the state's office of adult education, part of the department of Labor and Workforce Development.

"The other key element is that education is generational, and tolerance—or the lack thereof—often is, too. If



Rochelle Cox-Negusu (left), an adult education teacher from the Federal Correction facility in Memphis, talks with Ruth Tanner (right), THC executive director, about using a model lesson on the Holocaust with her students. Her community partner, Inez Hicks, also an adult education professional from Memphis City Schools, reviews the written materials.

we can teach the parents, we can reach the child as well. That is of the utmost importance to us. It has a ripple effect."

Teachers were exposed to this multifaceted approach while attending a seminar in November at the Washington museum.

"It's really easy to integrate it into the writing part [of class] or into math," said Beverly Capps, an adult education teacher in Tullahoma, Coffee County, who attended the session in Washington.

"For example, in math, we'll discuss how many calories a day [students] have, and how many Holocaust victims had."

She added: "Some of my black students have said, 'We think that we have it bad,' until realizing that they're not the first people to be targeted for their race. The whole thing is based on teaching tolerance to prevent history from repeating itself. We've had lots of bantering ...

about what they would have done" in similar circumstances.

Cox-Negusu also notices the program's effect on her students. "In prison, you have a lot of diversity. The best thing, besides teaching them vocational stuff, is teaching how to get along with people," she said.

"Holocaust history does a good job in making people think about diversity and how bad thoughts can lead to destruction. It reinforces tolerance for cultural, religious and racial diversity. Holocaust history leads to discussions that you may not otherwise be able to have. It leads to a non-threatening environment."

Nancy Martindale, an adult education teacher in Rhea County, assigns her students research projects on Holocaust victims, the idea being that students "learn history much better if it's made personal," she said.

Martindale assigns each student to read the short biographies of two people who suffered in the Holocaust—"These are your people," she'll say—and summarizes the reading. The biographies come from the THC-provided "toolkit."

One student, a 30-something native of Puerto Rico named Magdalena, became emotional when reading of a 17-year-old eastern European girl who shared her first name and who died in the Holocaust.

Students were instructed to write a few paragraphs on their subjects and project what they might have achieved in life.

"They really worked hard on them. I got some really interesting answers," said Martindale. "An 18-year-old student wrote of his subject, 'He would have become a poet or a famous musician.'"

The exercise, Martindale hopes, "will help them work together and ... be more tolerant, not be so quick to judge."

"I see some signs of that, some evidence that they're including other people in their group activities," she said.

Berga Conference Spotlights Treatment of GIs

For more than 50 years, Bill Shapiro hid the most painful period of his life: when the U.S. Army private and medic was taken captive by the Germans in World War II and nearly worked and marched to death.

The episode constituted the largest-scale persecution and killing by the Nazis of American prisoners-of-war, but, until last year, nearly no one knew about it.

The Tennessee Holocaust Commission, however, organized a seminar last October 28 that studied the case of what is now known simply as "Berga," after the concentration camp near the Czechoslovak border to which the captured American soldiers whom the Germans identified as Jews were taken. In fact, some were Jewish. Most were not.

Entitled "Forgotten Victims: American Soldiers in the Holocaust," the day-long seminar, sponsored by THC's Irvin and Elizabeth Limor Educational Outreach Program (EOP), drew secondary school teachers and students to Vanderbilt University's Sarratt Cinema. It was one of several educational events that THC offers throughout the year to encourage Holocaust education and increase the knowledge of both students and teachers.

The conference was "immensely successful," reported Ruth Tanner, THC's executive director, drawing 300 teachers and students from 22 school districts. It was planned by an organizing committee comprised of Jewish and non-Jewish educators and community members.

Nashville attorney Irwin Venick discussed the soldiers' capture and ordeal in the context of the Geneva Convention of 1929's provisions dealing with humane treatment of prisoners of war. Diane Clements, a teacher of advance-placement European history at Montgomery Bell Academy in Nashville, offered an introduction to the Holocaust and the events preceding World War II. The release in May 2003 of a PBS documentary film, *Berga: Soldiers of*



Bill Shapiro, Wallace Carden and Gerry Daub (left to right), all Berga survivors, flank Tony Acevedo, a former Army medic at Berga, who holds his Red Cross armband that was signed by other Berga prisoners at their liberation.

Another War, spurred THC to schedule the conference. The film was screened at the Vanderbilt gathering.

The program highlight, all agreed, was the panel discussion that climaxed the day. The panelists were four U.S. soldiers who were captured at the Battle of the Bulge in 1944 and, after being held briefly at the Stalag 9-B prison camp in Bad Orb, Germany, were sent to Berga: Shapiro, Pfc. Tony Acevedo, Pfc. Gerry Daub and Private Wallace Carden. That discussion was videotaped and THC makes the tape available to teachers in the state. (Contact THC for details.)

"What made this event so significant—and this was the beauty of it—was that it brought [out] people who went through it," said Avi Poster, a retired Chicago history teacher and principal who moved to Nashville three years ago and who helped organize the program with other members of the planning committee. "For the kids to interact with someone who experienced [Berga] brought the episode to life for the students [and] brought the truth to the surface."

Poster said that the EOP planning committee aimed to develop the program in a way that "would make sense" to teenagers, by posing ethical questions for discussion. For example, students were asked: What would you have done if forced to identify Jews

under your command? The film provides an instructive answer. When the Germans pressured U.S. officer Hans Kasten to relinquish names, he refused, was beaten and shipped to Berga as further punishment.

Shapiro, a physician in New York before retiring to Florida, was contacted in 1996 by an Army officer working on his thesis on the Nazis' treatment of American POWs, who'd stumbled across a file that discussed the Bad Orb-to-Berga deportation. A year later he attended a reunion of Stalag 9-B prisoners, none of whom had known that 350 fellow soldiers (including 80 Jews) were sent east, or that 25 of the 350 died of overwork and starvation.

Shapiro "hadn't spoken to anyone" in the intervening 52 years about his ordeal, he said, but was glad to do so in the film and at the THC conference. "The victims remained silent, just like Holocaust victims—many of them—remained silent for a while."

All in all, said Poster, the conference was an "exciting, intellectually challenging" event for students and teachers. "The day evolved from an intellectual view of history to a very emotional one. Everyone in the audience was asked to examine how we would have dealt with these circumstances. Our own sense of survival was challenged."



Griff Watson stands with Vladka Meed, Holocaust survivor and founder of the pre-eminent educators' summer study tour in Poland and Israel, at a reception in Washington for alumni of the program. Watson became the educational consultant to THC in March. He will be responsible for expanding educational experiences and maintaining a network for secondary and adult education teachers statewide.

SAVE THE DATE!

The Tennessee Holocaust Commission
is marking
its 20th anniversary of service
to the state, providing
remembrance and education
on the lessons of the Holocaust.

Please join the Commission
as we mark the 20th observance
of Yom Hashoah.

Where: State Capitol, Old Supreme Court
Chamber, second floor

When: Tuesday, April 20, 2004, 1:30 p.m.

For details, visit
www.tennesseeholocaustcommission.org

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