

News from Remember Us

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Announcing
Regional
Partnerships

Fall
2007

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

Status of the Remember Us Project

Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project offers an invitation to children who are preparing for bar/bat mitzvah to connect with the memories of children who were lost in the Holocaust before they could be called to the Torah.

The Project works with all denominations. Congregations across the country and around the world are participating.

More than 6,000 children in 204 congregations have accepted the invitation to remember individual children as they are being called to the Torah.

Participation in the **Remember Us Project** grew by 40% in 2006, and will exceed 50% this year, in terms of both participating synagogues and number of students.

Excellent New Resource for Holocaust Educators

Teaching children (or anyone) about the Holocaust only begins with the recitation of the historical facts. The deeper and more important task is to lead students in a process of synthesizing personal meaning from the historical narrative. How does one find meaning in the inexplicable, let alone teach it? A superb new resource is now available to teachers that supports this deeper task: *Teaching the Holocaust* by Simone Schweber and Debbie Findling (Torah Aura, 2007).

The glory of this book is the respect the authors have for both the contemporary teacher and student. Nowadays moral ambiguity abounds in television shows, children's literature, comics, and movies. Think of Spiderman, Lemony Snicket, Harry Potter—heroes struggling with wounded souls and moral dilemmas; villains whose villainy, though not

condoned, is at least explained by circumstances that formed them against their wills. Children understand these distinctions and we, as educators, underserve them with tales of heroic martyrs, despicable villains, and altruistic rescuers. *Teaching the Holocaust* has the integrity, compassion, and courage of assuming the full humanity of all concerned, both in history and now. In the classroom, this positioning of the book on the moral landscape is a valuable lesson in itself.

For teachers this departure from the usual forms represents a challenge. Expertise in the subject, which the book provides, is the prologue to leading a moral inquiry. In the same way that the historical players are served in truth through depicting their full humanity, the teacher who facilitates this meaning-making

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The Remember Us Service Project—A Mitzvah Opportunity

The **Remember Us Project** is pleased to announce the formation of the *Remember Us Service Project* for interested bnei mitzvah students. The Service Project was created after several bnei mitzvah students decided that they wanted to spread the word about **Remember Us** to the Jewish communities in their areas. Because of the initiative of these students, the Service Project was formed. Service Project guidelines are available to teachers and families upon request.

One student who recently made the Service Project his mitzvah project is Zachary White of Orlando, Florida. Zachary is the first student in Orlando, Florida to remember a lost child through **Remember Us**.

Zack and his family are members of Congregation Ohev Shalom, Orlando. For his fulfillment of the mitzvah project he is introducing **Remember Us** to his bnei mitzvah class with the support of Cantor Robuck and Rabbi Rubinger. He has



Zachary White

also chosen to visit several synagogues in Orlando and The Holocaust Memorial Center of Central Florida to explain the **Remember Us Project**.

To complete his project Zack will report back to **Remember Us** with the results of his work.

Also, Zack will model participation for his classmates and community at his bar mitzvah in January. His speech from the bimah will include information about **Remember Us** and about the lost child he is honoring, Kelman Fonfat. He plans to put an empty chair draped with a tallit on the Bimah for Kelman.

Zachary has become a partner in helping **Remember Us** fulfill its mission to offer Bnei Mitzvah students the opportunity to remember a child who was lost in the Holocaust before coming to the Torah. We are grateful to him and all the other students who have chosen to help **Remember Us**.

To bring the **Remember Us Bnei Mitzvah Service Project** to your community, please send an email with your name, address, and phone number to remember@sonic.net. ■

Excellent New Resource *Continued from page 1*

process will do best revealing his/her own full humanity in so far as that's appropriate to the task. By providing a model of how one deals with uncertainty, ambiguity, and paradox, the teacher facilitates the formation of similar capabilities in the student. We can be certain that this is a capacity that will be called on by the modern world: how do students form an opinion about Barry Bonds, Iraq, or Marion Jones?

In clear, accessible prose, Schweber and Findling begin by providing summaries to help educators navigate the wealth of research and personal accounts available on the Holocaust. The chapters are constructed on a consistent framework. First there is an introduction to the issues in meaning-making for the subject of the chapter. For example, in the chapter on camps the issues are: conveying the continuum of humanity/inhumanity inherent in camp existence; and recognizing the symbolic role the camps play in representing a complex historical progression of events.

Following this introduction is a statement of the "big ideas" and the key terms. One reviewer writes that this framework "leads students down a path of understanding human complexities and the daunting moral questions that arise out of war in general and the Holocaust specifically." The big ideas are then discussed concisely, filling out the historical facts in the context of the moral questions. Each chapter then brings

the subject into the classroom through marvelous and morally meaningful teaching activities developed on ideas that purposefully avoid easy answers and engage students in the hard questions that weave throughout this history.

The **Remember Us Project** recognizes that children can become fully qualified moral agents who can act redemptively through a commitment to memory. They develop their own moral capacity through a compassionate connection to the losses of the Holocaust. *Teaching the Holocaust* offers an opportunity to deepen the students' understanding of both history, moral dilemma, and their own place in the complexities of human existence. It is highly recommended.

About the Authors Simone Schweber is the Goodman Professor of Education and Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison where she conducts research on how teachers in various school settings teach about the Holocaust and what students learn. Her last book, on Holocaust education in American public high schools, is entitled *Making Sense of the Holocaust: Lessons from Classroom Practice* (published by Teachers College Press, New York, 2004). For more than 10 years Debbie Findling led Holocaust-education pilgrimages to Poland and Israel for the March of the Living. Her doctoral dissertation investigated Holocaust education memory-work, and she also holds graduate degrees in education and literature in Hebrew

German Press Recognizes Remember Us Project

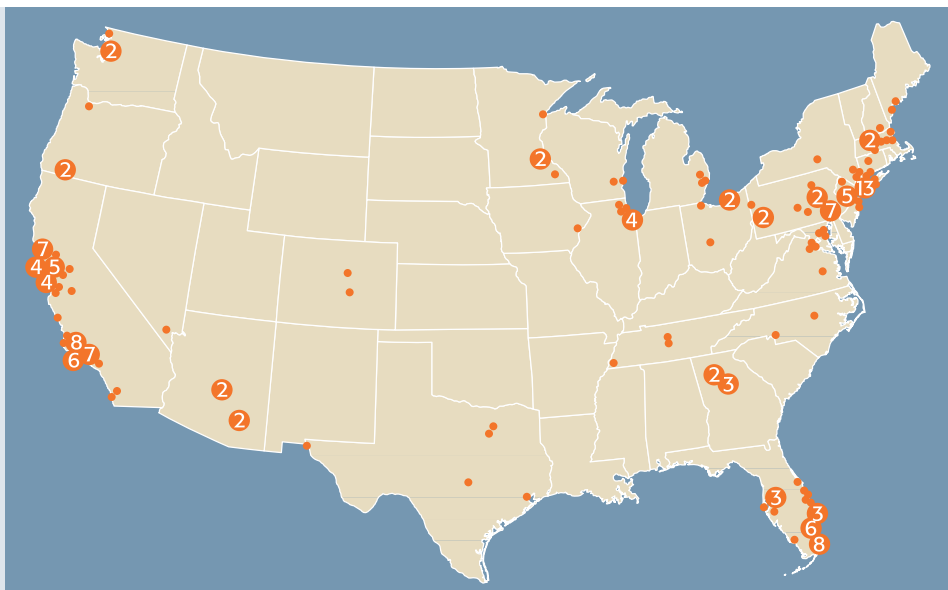
One of the goals of the **Remember Us Project** has been that, one day, it would be available to children in Germany. A small beginning has been made this month with the publication of an article about the Project in the German newspaper *Juedisches Berlin*, a bi-lingual German-Russian newspaper in Berlin.

The connection was made by Dr. Hermann Simon, Director of the New Synagogue Berlin-Centrum Judaicum, a Jewish historical museum located in a restored Berlin synagogue. Dr. Simon learned about the program while on a speaking tour. He informs us that the Jewish population of Berlin is mostly comprised of Jewish immigrants from the Eastern bloc and FSU, and that Holocaust remembrance is not an active process among this population. The article's author endorses and recommends the **Remember Us** approach of remembrance carried on through a commitment by the children. ■

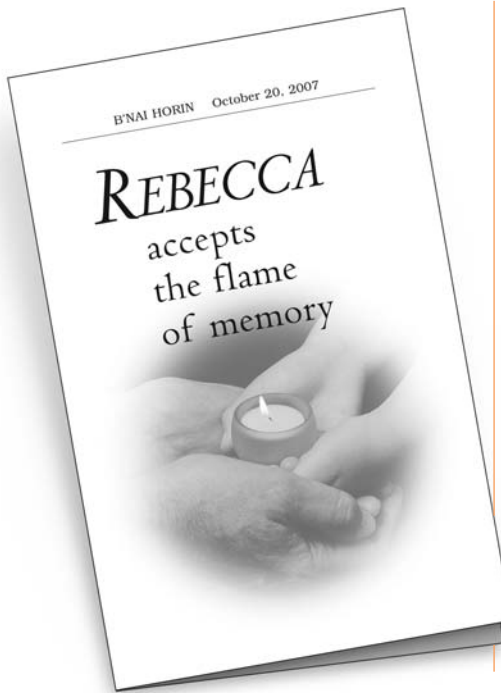
letters from the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. She was an early supporter of the **Remember Us** concept. ■

Participation in Remember Us Project Growing Steadily

The **Remember Us Project** has now been adopted by approximately 15% of American Reform and Conservative congregations. Early outreach efforts concentrated on the major Jewish population centers. From this strong base we now reach out to congregations around the country. Please see the story on regional partnerships on the facing page.



Customized Pamphlets Explain Remembrance to Guests



The **Remember Us Project** is providing customized pamphlets to distribute to guests at bar/bat mitzvahs. The pamphlets explain the young person's participation in an act of remembrance. Each booklet is customized with the name, date, and synagogue, and with the name of the child being remembered. Ordering information is included on the back of the Parent Guide. Following is the text from a pamphlet recently provided to a family:

Rebecca is leading the congregation today—living proof that the plan to annihilate the Jewish people launched sixty years ago in Europe has been utterly defeated.

Over one-and-a-half million Jewish children died in the Holocaust. No one has ever been able to say why. It is beyond human understanding, a perpetual grief in the heart of humanity.

At best there are only fragmentary

records of these young lives. Their persecutors did not consider them significant. Much of the information about the children comes from the memories of those who survived or those who escaped. Their love saved these memories.

Rebecca has chosen to bring one name and history back into living memory as she becomes bat mitzvah. Victoria Farhi—a name that once existed in a data base of the lost—has now become once again dear to living souls. By this act of memory Rebecca becomes a guardian of the Jewish past and the realization of the Jewish future.

One of our holy teachers, Rabbi Nachman, wrote "with great joy comes sadness, with sadness comes great joy." Today as you celebrate Rebecca's bat mitzvah and her act of memory, you too embody this most Jewish mix—elation that is mindful of past sorrows, and abiding sadness transmuted by present joy. ■

A Beshert Tale Leads to Regional Partnerships

A true story: A rabbi at a mid-Western congregation offered his support for the **Remember Us Project**. He sent a donation and told us the name a congregant who was a program officer at a local foundation. We researched the foundation and were preparing to make a grant application.

Soon thereafter we attended a conference of Jewish philanthropists. On the last day I was returning to my room for the luggage. On the of elevator was this very same man. What followed was the quintessential "elevator conversation": Me: "Oh, I know your rabbi, he's going to introduce us." Him: "Oh, really, well here's my card. Goodbye."

At home, we begin the grant application process, with very warm and helpful support for my new acquaintance. We get the grant! But . . . a call a week later: "You have a fiscal agent and not a 501c3. It's our policy not to fund through fiscal agents."

Flash forward six months to Rosh Hashanah. We are invited to a dinner, and meet a resident of the same city as the foundation. She is the executive of a Jewish agency, and knows the program officer well. In the course of the conversation I tell this story.

What ensues is amazing. Through her efforts, we will be invited to the city for a teaching and outreach tour, on a service contract to the local agency funded by that same grant.

The Opportunity

The outcome is a model of regional partnerships that has become a new strategic direction for the **Remember Us Project**. You, dear reader, can make the next chapter in this beshert tale.

Gesher Calmenson, the Project's Founder, is going to be making teaching and outreach visits to cities where there is already some participation in **Remember Us**. Programs have been developed for pre-teens, teens, adults, and families that look at the Holocaust as a source of teaching for modern life. Age-appropriate conversations use the Holocaust as a context for talking about performance-enhancing drugs of all sorts, abortion, civic morality, politics, sports. The adult program uses the PaRDeS approach to begin to unpack the Holocaust as Torah.

If you would like to work together to bring a teaching visit to your congregation or city, please be in touch: remember@sonic.net. ■

A Psychiatrist Comments on Remember Us

We recently received a letter from a parent whose daughter is preparing for bat mitzvah. He articulates beautifully what has always been the vision of the **Remember Us Project**.

"As a psychotherapy-oriented psychiatrist, I am profoundly grateful for what you have started. It is a rare gift when we are given the opportunity to transform the shame of an intolerable and unfathomably toxic affective experience into something meaningful, interpersonally intimate, and actionable for the benefit of all."



Remember Us

The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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Meet the Volunteers: Merv Durlenster

We introduce Merv Durlenster, a volunteer Memorial Pages writer. Merv volunteers in order to keep alive the memories of those who perished in the Holocaust, including members of his own extended family.

Born and raised in San Francisco, California, Merv was educated at Lowell High School and University of California, Berkeley where he majored in Economics. He worked in administration at New York Life Insurance for almost 40 years. He and wife Hedy settled in San Jose, California, raised their three children in San Jose and participated in Temple Emanu-el there for close to 30 years. Their son and his family now live in Reno, Nevada; their daughters' families live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

When Merv and Hedy "retired" to Santa Rosa, they shared the position of Temple Administrator for Congregation Shomrei Torah for the first 8 years. They retired again when the position became 10 hours a day for each of them; it took a full-time Administrator and two staff members to replace them!

Merv has been a tireless volunteer, creating 20 or more Memorial Pages



Merv Durlenster

per day whenever needed. Over the course of his service to **Remember Us** he has created close to 1,000 Memorial Pages.

He recently told us how satisfactory it has been to attend a Bar or Bat Mitzvah in his own congregation and hear the name of a child whose Memorial Page he created. "That was mine and I am so glad to be able to do something so worthwhile." ■

Remember Us Project Joins Mentoring Program

Remember Us is honored to be included in an innovative new venture, the Jewish Professionals Cooperative. The program offers guidance, education, and support for small Jewish organizations that are creating new approaches to Jewish experience, ritual, activities, and education.

Being included in the program comes at an opportune time for the Project. We have completed our initial goals of piloting the program and introducing it to a wide population of American synagogues. Our planning process, being guided by the Coop staff, is addressing issues of continuity, growth, strategic planning, and funding.

The one-year program is funded by the Jewish Federation of San Francisco and its home is at the San Francisco Bureau of Jewish Education. **Remember Us** is the only Coop member with a mission in Holocaust remembrance. Other members include an organization that helps unaffiliated families with Jewish ritual, a comprehensive Jewish webcasting service, a group that uses Israeli music videos to teach American students about issues in Israel, and a foundation for educating students about Jewish partisan activities in World War 2. ■

NEW Participating Communities

The **Remember Us Project** welcomes the following congregations to the Project. May they go from strength to strength!

Tal Torah, Jerusalem, Israel
 Ramat Shalom, Mexico City, Mexico
 Congregation Or Chadash, Tucson, AZ
 Temple Beth Abraham, Oakland, CA
 Interfaith Inventions Inc., Ojai, CA
 Judaic Studies by Nomie, Westlake Village, CA
 Leo Baeck Temple, Los Angeles, CA
 Congregation Ner Tamid of South Bay, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA
 Temple Beth Jacob, Redwood City, CA
 Temple Beit Ha Yam, Stuart, FL
 Temple Beth El, Hollywood, FL
 Temple Shir Shalom, Oviedo, FL
 Temple Kol Ami Emanu-el, Plantation, FL
 Congregation Shearith Israel, Atlanta, GA
 Temple Sinai, Atlanta, GA
 Temple Emanuel, Davenport, IA
 Temple Beth El, Springfield, MA
 Temple Ohabei Shalom, Brookline, MA

The Holocaust Museum and Study Center, Spring Valley, MA
 Adat Chaim Congregation, Reisterstown, MD
 Beth Israel Congregation, Bath, ME
 Congregation Bet Ha'am, South Portland, ME
 B'nai Israel Synagogue, Rochester, MN
 Temple B'nai Or, Morristown, NJ
 Congregation Ner Tamid, Henderson, NV
 Nanuet Hebrew Center, New City, NY
 Tribeca Hebrew, New York, NY
 Congregation B'nai Israel, Sylvania, OH
 Congregation Kol Ami, Elkins Park, PA
 Shir Ami Bucks County Jewish Congregation, Newton, PA
 Temple Israel, Memphis, TN
 Congregation Agudas Achim, Austin, TX
 Temple Shalom, Dallas, TX
 Congregation B'nai Zion, El Paso, TX
 Congregation Emanu El, Houston, TX
 Congregation Beth Torah, Richardson, TX
 Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation, Reston, VA ■

An Echo of the Holocaust

This may be a familiar experience for those of us who work with children: looking at our beautiful kids and hearing an echo of the Holocaust inside: "How could this have happened?" Here are the words of a recent bar mitzvah who turns memory into action:

"I have chosen to remember a special boy that passed away during the Holocaust through the **Remember Us Project**. I have chosen Gabor Neumann, a four-year-old who was deported to Auschwitz and murdered on June 29, 1944. I have chosen Gabor because I spent this past summer at Camp Macabee working with four-year-olds. Gabor never had the opportunity to ride a bike, go to school, or become a Bar Mitzvah. May his memory be a source of blessing."