

Hadassah-Israel Levonah Chapter & ESRA Yom HaShoah Memorial Event

28th April 2022

By Marion Stone

It was another evening of learning and remembering, brought together by a joint committee of Hadassah-Israel and ESRA members.

Hedy Shron introduced Hadassah-Israel Levonah co-President, Zenia Cohen, who welcomed everyone in the audience and praised everyone on the joint planning committee for their cooperation and hard work.

Zenia then introduced Shlomo Pazy, Deputy Mayor of Modi'in, who made it clear to the audience that from year to year fewer and fewer witnesses to what happened during the Holocaust are around to tell their stories, but the stories must continue to be told because they stand against the lies of deniers, as the truth.

There are still wars in the world, but even though innocent people are being killed mercilessly and suffering much loss they are not causing the same cruelty as the mass systematic widespread suffering and murder that targeted large Jewish populations.

Pazy said that Israel must continue to stand strong against any future threats to our nation, such as Iran, for in today's world we can only depend on ourselves.

The Memorial Candlelighting ceremony was led by Ruchama Berkovitch, who introduced the 6 people who were to light a candle, one for each million Jews who were murdered during the second world war.

Bonnie Bachenheimer, Beverley Rockman Edel, Judy Rubin Golub, Yehuda Sapir, Lucy Schonbach, Florence Wiener all described their families and what happened to them, and each lit a candle.

Each individual told about their family, grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles who had lost their lives or suffered deep pain, and how those who survived rebuilt their lives in freedom.

El Maale Rachamim was then recited by Chazan David Apfel.

Chaim Sanders spoke about his connection to the evening's main speaker, Charles Siegman, and told us of the illustrious career that he achieved after his horrific experiences as a child trying to survive in inhumane conditions.

And then, Charles Siegman came onto the stage and kept the audience gripped as he told his story.

He crafted his talk with a comprehensive overview, beginning by giving some background to how the war began and developed, reaching Holland, (where he was born in 1935), in May 1940. He graphically described what he went through as a child, in camps, and not knowing what the next minute would bring. By the

end of the war, he was no longer a child, even though he was only 10 years old. He didn't have a childhood as we recognize childhood in peacetime. Much of his family had been murdered, but he and his brother and sister managed to survive. After the war ended, his sister went to relatives in Zurich and he and his brother were taken in by an uncle and aunt in New York.

He told us that in contrast to his lost childhood, his life has been rewarding. His uncle and aunt ensured a good education for him at a yeshiva and he gained a more secular education at university. By retirement, he had held impressive senior positions, including advisor to the International Monetary Fund.

He and his wife have 4 children, 13 grandchildren, and many great-grandchildren. To date, 4 grandsons have served in the IDF and 3 granddaughters have served in Sherut Leumi. A response to what Hitler tried to do to the Jewish people, and a response to be proud of.

Charles made some interesting concluding remarks that are particularly thought-provoking. He said that he wasn't in control of his life as decisions were not made by him, but by others. Throughout, he always had faith in Hashem to protect him.

Being a survivor did not excuse any shortcomings that he may personally have, and he qualified this by saying that he always wanted to be judged by his own achievements, and not as a Holocaust survivor. It is not anyone's place to judge others in such dire straits.

He cited a comparison between a man, no longer wanting to be Jewish, who had thrown his Tefillin from the transport train. The man who picked up the Tefilin put them on for the first time in his life.

The question should not be 'where was G-d?', but 'where was the civilized man?'

The Germans came close to winning the war. It is frightening that there are so many Holocaust deniers of so much evidence and documentation that exists. Anti-semitism is on the rise again and must be curbed.

He further told us how important it is for Israel to be strong. The Jewish State must be supported and must prosper. Never again should doors be closed to Jews who must flee from danger.

He ended with: "Even if we were not alive during the Holocaust, we are all survivors".

Rabbi Jeffrey Shron sang a most heartrending song, 'Born To Remember', with music and lyrics by Sam Glaser.

Born to Remember by Sam Glaser

Dreams, what are these dreams

Why are these images returning every night

***Who is breathing life, into these photographs of fading black and white
Out of the depths, of a darkness we can never hope to understand
Somehow the voices still sing, "We survive"***

Born to remember, born to remember our families

Born to remember, for no one will speak of their legacy.

A lesson learned not very long ago, from generations we will never know

We tell their story to the world today, a world silent as they passed away

Mama, hold me close, please tell me everything my bubby used to say

How did she go on, as she watched them take her family away

Out of the depths, of a darkness we can never hope to understand

Somehow she fought with every breath, to keep the flame alive

Born to remember, born to remember our families

Born to remember, cause all we have left are the memories

A lesson learned not very long ago, from generations we will never know

We tell their story to the world today, a world silent as they passed away

We have been hoping for a rainbow, some eternal sign

That hate and fear will disappear forevermore

Born to remember how relentlessly, they disassembled each community

Packed all our precious ones in cattle cars, sent on a one way trip into the stars

Born to remember how their bodies froze,

While marching barefoot through the winter snows

Becoming numb to hungry children's cries, catching their final glimpse of butterflies

Dreams, we are their dreams

We are the future that those children were denied

Will we be their voice, if we remember then they never really died

16-year-old Akiva Sprung, a student at Yeshivat Lapid, told about a project he is involved with that focuses on Life in the Holocaust.

Memory is a fundamental value in traditional Judaism, but memory alone is not enough. We should always be proactive.

Carol Lipman read out the 23 dedications to victims that had been given for the evening.

She also expressed thanks to all those who have contributed to keeping memories alive.

Judy Golub, chair of ESRA Modi'in branch, spoke about the milestones in Jewish life and said that memories must be kept alive at this time when the new generations are stepping further away from the reality. It is important for us to feel that we ourselves survived. She thanked everyone who contributed to the evening

The event concluded with the audience standing and singing the Hatikvah, led by David Apfel