

Holocaust Memorial Day – a personal reflection

I was honoured recently to be invited to talk to the children of Dundee High School about my wartime experiences, as part of their Holocaust Memorial studies.

It was an emotional event for me, since all my life I had kept a low profile, seldom discussing with anyone that I am Jewish. Don't get me wrong, I am immensely proud to be Jewish, it was simply that I was not prepared to have to defend myself.

The children were more respectful, more interested, more involved than I had expected. My talk took place during their lunch break, attendance was voluntary, yet the room was packed. I was listened to in complete silence. The questions afterwards were thoughtful. I was pampered by the staff - and given a huge basket of flowers (which a member of staff later even drove back to St Andrews for me because it was too big to take home on the bus).

My next invitation was to St Vincent's Catholic Primary School, in a deprived area of Dundee. The children had been studying WWI and wanted a first-hand account. Again, the young children were respectfully attentive, with interesting questions to follow. I was astonished by the quality of their artwork the length of a long corridor. After the Easter break which immediately followed, I was surprised, and most deeply touched to receive at my house a box full of individually made thank-you cards, each one lovingly crafted, without a grammar or spelling mistake. I shall keep all of them for my grandchildren!

Finally, I was invited by the History Society of Dundee University to talk in the vast auditorium of the Dalhousie Building. Again, to my surprise there was a good turn out, which included local residents. Once more I was treated with the utmost courtesy, and kindness, and listened to in respectful silence. Now I can't call myself a Holocaust survivor, because my mother, brother, and I mercifully got out from Vienna in the nick of time, though my father was interned in Buchenwald, from where he escaped, spending the war in Israel.

What can I conclude from the experience of talking to these young people of different ages? All of them showed real interest. Can it be that our Jewish leaders are missing something here? With all the misinformation in our media and on the BBC I get frustrated by what seems to me to be an absence of support from our leaders in countering the lies. Can these young people show us that truth has a ready audience? Can we capitalise on it, write more letters to the press, give more published interviews, go to more schools? Are these young people from such diverse backgrounds the seed we need to turn round anti-Semitism, the anti-Israel bias? I have to leave it to you to decide, but we do need to act.

For those who wish to view the contribution Dundee Hebrew Congregation offered to the National Holocaust Memorial Day event, held in the city a few years ago, please visit:

http://www.scojec.org/news/2012/12i_hmd/hmd1.html