

## **Holocaust Memorial Day 2012 – Scottish National Event, Caird Hall, Dundee**

### **Presentation by Iona Broadhurst and Faith Bulle**

#### **Iona Broadhurst**

We attend Grove Academy in Dundee and we speak to you this evening as Ambassadors for the Holocaust Educational Trust.

In September, we along with 222 other students and teachers flew to Poland for the day. It was part of the Holocaust Educational Trust's *Lessons from Auschwitz Project* which, thanks to funding from the Scottish Government, offers two students from every school in Scotland aged 16 to 18, the opportunity to go on a one day visit to Auschwitz–Birkenau as part of a four-part programme.

“Don't hate.”

This is the advice of the inspirational Holocaust survivor Zigi Shipper to future generations. We had the privilege of hearing Zigi share his testimony before we visited Poland. This helped us a little to prepare for what we were about to experience. Zigi lost so much during the Holocaust – most of his family, his childhood and his education. He was 9 when the Nazis invaded Poland. Now when someone who has experienced what hate can do says, “Don't hate” I believe we have a duty to listen.

It is so difficult to try and put into words what it was like visiting Auschwitz–Birkenau, and much of what I saw I have yet to fully process, it is almost beyond words. I have been left with a feeling I believe will always be with me – it is so enduring and my belief is stronger than ever in the importance of speaking up when I see injustice around me. I have seen with my own eyes what can happen when extremist ideologies go unchallenged.

Seeing the aftermath of the Holocaust for myself differed so much from reading about it in school textbooks. It is one thing to read the figure “six million Jews” in black and white print, or to be reminded that this is the equivalent of everyone in Scotland today being killed, but it is another thing to actually stand in the place where these events actually happened. Personally the images that have stayed with me was seeing the piles of belongings of the prisoners. The shoes, tins of shoe polish, and toothbrushes. I started to appreciate that all the possessions that I was looking at really belonged to individuals, real people who did not deserve to die, and were ultimately killed because they happened to be born a certain faith. Our guide said to us, “they cared about tomorrow, but tomorrow never came.” It made me reflect on the fact that in an age when we can buy any luxury, it is almost impossible trying to imagine living without basics as the prisoners at Auschwitz were forced to do.

#### **Faith Bulle**

As Iona has said we were both extremely moved by our experiences of visiting Auschwitz–Birkenau and also hearing from a Holocaust survivor. I appreciated my right to free speech and the fact that in the United Kingdom, my voice was probably the most powerful thing that I had as a weapon against future injustice.

The Holocaust Educational Trust's *Lessons from Auschwitz* Project is based on the idea that seeing, is different to hearing. As Ambassadors our role is to then educate schools and the wider community about the Holocaust and its contemporary lessons. This involves finding ways to share what we have seen and learnt with others in our community – both the historical and contemporary lessons. Iona and I realised that what had the most impact on us was when we glimpsed the individuals caught up in the events of the Holocaust for ourselves.

We decided to use Art as a way to educate students in our school community about the events of the Holocaust. We chose Art partly because we thought it was a good medium for expressing the complex feelings that the subject of the Holocaust can evoke. We also hoped it would reach all abilities of students. Along with stories about individuals and families, we showed the students photos from our visit - the piles of shoes, pots, pans, hairbrushes etc, and through this we allowed the students to in some small way start to relate to these victims as people: do they also have a hairbrush? Do they care what they look like everyday? Do they have a favourite outfit or write their names on a luggage tag when they are away from home? We were trying to encourage empathy to help others to really see the relevance of the Holocaust in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Next we spoke to the students about how each shoe represented an individual. Each was somebody who had their own unique personality, hopes, dreams, likes and dislikes. Their identity had been stolen from them when they became a prisoner or were killed and their shoes were all that remained. We asked the students to consider that if all that was left behind of them was in the form of a possession, what would they want to be found? From here, the students have been working towards creating artwork, they each started by drawing their own shoe, then bringing in photographs and cuttings of anything they felt represented them as an individual, each going towards a collage. We are all different, we have different beliefs, cultures and religions and backgrounds but most importantly we are all human beings.

The theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is "Speak up, speak out". I hope each student we have worked with has fully appreciated their right to be an individual and to speak as an individual. In Britain today, we continue to see racist attitudes present. In difficult economic times there can be further room for prejudice. Young people like us want to be involved in change for good, we don't want to live in a world where people hate. Iona and I have now seen with our own eyes the tragic effects prejudice and discrimination. As Holocaust Educational Trust Student Ambassadors, we feel committed to ensuring that our generation, and future generations will speak out against injustice. We have two powerful weapons – our knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, and our voices.