COMMEMORATING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LIBERATION OF AUSCHWITZ: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

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COMMEMORATING THE 80TH ANNIVERSARY OF AUSCHWITZ'S LIBERATION

As President of The National Holocaust Monument, Ottawa, and as a second-generation witness, I am honoured to share with you my personal thoughts as we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on January 27, 2025. This event marked not only the end of one of the darkest chapters in human history but also served as a powerful symbol of hope, resilience, and the triumph of good over evil.

THE NATIONAL HOLOCAUST MONUMENT: A SYMBOL OF REMEMBRANCE

The National Holocaust Monument, Ottawa, was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Canada, The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, in 2017 and has since become a significant landmark in our country. The National Holocaust Monument Committee, volunteer-led by individuals with experience in the business, legal, and public service sectors, was established in 2019 with the sole objective of enhancing awareness and promoting the National Holocaust Monument through meaningful commemoration events that preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

OUR FLAGSHIP EVENTS

Over the past three years, our flagship events, International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27 and Yom HaShoah, held in April or May each year, have been the most important events at The National Holocaust Monument. The National Holocaust Monument Committee strives



National Holocaust Monument, Yom HaShoah, 2023



Meister Family Stolpersteine, Leipzig Germany

to honour the survivors, pay tribute to the millions of lives lost, and educate future generations about the Holocaust. Through education, remembrance, and the dissemination of historical facts, we can honour the victims and survivors and work toward a future free from hatred and discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that future generations never forget the importance of tolerance, compassion, and the preservation of human dignity.

THE POWER OF MEMORY

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains my sentiments so eloquently:

> *History is about facts; memory is about identity. History is about something that happened to someone else, not me. Memory is my story, the past who made me who I am, of whose legacy I am the guardian for the sake of generations yet to come. Without memory, there is no identity, and without identity, we are mere dust on the surface of infinity.* (Sacks, 2020)

A PERSONAL LEGACY

My mother, Alice Meister, was born in Leipzig, Germany. Her family was deported from Leipzig on May 10, 1942. My grandfather, Moritz Meister, and my uncle Alphonse would both perish in Auschwitz-Birkenau. My grandmother, aunts, and uncles perished in Majdanek death camp. A total of 15 members of my mother's immediate family were never seen again. My mother set sail on The St. Louis Ship in May 1939 and would be the sole survivor of her family, first arriving in Southampton and then making her way to Scotland. In her memoirs, she wrote: "I have no idea why I would be the only one to survive. All I can say is that it was as if a secret hand was guiding me throughout my life."

CONTINUING THE LEGACY

My mother taught me the importance of never giving up, and I continue this legacy on her behalf and for those who came before us. I hold my volunteer position with the National Holocaust



Alice Meister, Scotland, 1964

Monument close to my heart and am honoured to be a member of the National Holocaust Monument Committee. Working alongside such a dedicated group of individuals, the significance of legacy and the imperative act of remembrance is more important than ever. We are compelled to confront the depths of human cruelty and the consequences of unchecked hatred. So much has changed, and yet so much remains the same. Forgetting is not an option.

“My mother taught me the importance of never giving up, and I continue this legacy on her behalf and for those who came before us. I hold my volunteer position with the National Holocaust Monument close to my heart and am honoured to be a member of the National Holocaust Monument Committee.”

CONCLUSION

As we reflect on the lessons of the Holocaust and the memory of its survivors, we are reminded of the importance of preserving history and confronting hate. The National Holocaust Monument stands as a testament to that commitment, ensuring that future generations will carry forward the legacy of remembrance and education.

REFERENCES

Sacks, Rabbi Jonathan. *Morality: Restoring The Common Good In Divided Times*. New York: Basic Books, 2020.