

News from Remember Us

In this issue:
Programs from
Czechoslovakia
and Israel



Spring
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.

4897 children in 168 congregations have accepted the invitation to remember individual children as they are being called to the Torah. Countries now include the United States, Australia, Israel, and England.

NEW Participating Communities

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

Beth El Hebrew Congregation,
Alexandria, VA
Temple Beth El, Allentown, PA
Congregation Or-Hadash, Atlanta, GA
Avetura Turnberry JC Beth Jacob,
Aventura, FL
Temple B'Nai Tikvah, Calgary, AB, Canada
B'nai Jeshurun Congregation, Cleveland, OH
Congregation Beth Israel, Avon Lake, OH
Temple Sinai, Denver, CO
Valley Beth Shalom, Encino, CA
Congregation Solel, Highland Park, IL
IKAR, Los Angeles, CA
Wilshire Blvd Temple, Los Angeles, CA
Congregation Etz Chaim, Marietta, GA
Temple Kol Emeth, Marietta, GA
Temple Beth Am, Miami, FL
Temple Israel of Greater Miami, Miami, FL
Temple Beth Sholom, Miami Beach, FL
Shir Tikvah, Minneapolis, MN
Central Synagogue, New York, NY
Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, New York, NY
Magen Avraham Congregation, Omer,
Israel
Beth El Congregation, Phoenix, AZ
Congregation Beth Ahabah, Richmond, VA
Community Synagogue, Rye Brook, NY
Congregation Atz Ohr, Seattle, WA

Bnai Mitzvah Students Share their Passion

Frankie, Eli, Joshua, and Matthew all have something in common. They are Bnai Mitzvah students who have accepted the obligation of remembering a child lost in the Shoah by participating in the **Remember Us Project** (www.remember-us.org) and they have all chosen the same mitzvah project.

Frankie, from Owings Mills, Maryland, is bringing the Project to 18 synagogues in his area. He has written letters to all the Rabbis asking them to make **Remember Us** part of their Bnai Mitzvah program. One Rabbi wrote him back congratulating him on his efforts.

Eli, from Los Angeles, California, is working with his Rabbi and is making a presentation to the incoming Bnai Mitzvah class about participating in the Project and the importance of this mitzvah.

Matthew, from Rye, New York, made a presentation to 40 Bnai Mitzvah students at his synagogue this month and hopes to get 100% participation from the class.

Joshua, from Springfield, Massachusetts, is bringing **Remember Us** to his Bnai Mitzvah class next month in the hope that they will each want to remember a lost child.

These students are helping **Remember Us** to become an enduring Jewish ritual.

Group Mitzvah Project

Inspired by the **Remember Us Project**, five students from Congregation Ohr Tzafon decided to embroider a tallis b'shem (in the name of) Salo Weber. Salo was born in 1940. He lived in Kopyzintz, in the Tarnopol region of Poland. His mother's name was Chana, his father was Mosze. Salo died in the Holocaust in Kopyzintz in 1943. He was 3 years old. The students embroidered Salo's name and dates on the tallis and presented it to their congregation during a Shabbat service. Salo has now become part of the Ohr Tzafon family. ■

The Remember Us Project Travels to Atlanta, Georgia

In March, **Remember Us: The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project** was invited to participate in the second annual Showcase of the Jewish Funder's Network (JFN) annual conference. The conference is attended by members of the JFN, an organization made up of many of the most influential Jewish philanthropists in the U.S. and abroad.

Remember Us exhibited at the Showcase and had the opportunity to

tell interested funders about all of the Bnai Mitzvah students who've participated and some of their wonderful stories about how they are remembering the lost children. Two funders requested names for their sons/daughters who will coming to Bar/Bat Mitzvah in the next few months. Many people were moved by the project and some interesting ideas were generated for further international outreach opportunities. ■

Initial Phase of Yad Vashem Names Recovery Project Very Successful, More Effort Needed

The last generation of Holocaust survivors is inexorably growing smaller. The **Remember Us Project** is cooperating with Yad Vashem in a campaign to record their memories of Holocaust victims. Participating American Jewish communities are making a significant contribution to the success of this effort.

It has taken upwards of five decades to document the 3.1 million names currently listed in the online Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names. The Names Recovery Project is an 11th hour campaign to add as yet unrecorded names of Jews murdered in the Holocaust and, when available, photos and other biographical data. "Millions more names may be lost forever," warns Avner Shalev, Chairman of Yad Vashem. "Jewish communities play a key role by actively reaching out to the generation that best remembers before it is too late."

Since the Names Database went online (www.yadvashem.org) in November 2004, there have been over 11 million visitors from 215 countries. Some 465,000 names and biographical details and nearly 5,000 photos have been added to the Database, through the Names Recovery Project. The Database is available in English, Hebrew and Russian.

More information and material about the Database and the 11th hour names recovery campaign, can be found at:

http://www.yadvashem.org/lwp/workplace/IY_HON_Welcome

For additional information contact Rachelle Grossman, (212) 220-4304 or by email at rgrossman@yadvashemusa.org. ■



Connecting the Generations

This true story was written by the grandfather (Fred Amran) of Zoe, a recent Bat Mitzvah and Remember Us participant in Worcester, Mass. Fred's story is about his family during the war. He writes about his cousin, Aaltje Wurms, who died in Auschwitz before her fourth birthday.

Zoe read her grandfather's story at her Bat Mitzvah as part of her remembrance about a lost child with the very same name.

I'M AN ONLY CHILD. It was customary for young German adults during the Holocaust to have only one child—often none at all. "Why bring more Jewish children into a world like this?" my mother, Mutti, would often ask. Why, indeed. Papa had an older sister, Tante Beda, who married Ernst Lustig. No children. Papa's younger brother, roly-poly Onkel

Max, my favorite of all relatives, married Jenny late in life. No children. They all died of natural causes in the United States. Mutti was the oldest of three girls. The second, Karola, married Jakob Stern. No children. She died in the Riga, Latvia, ghetto on January 6, 1945. Perhaps Onkel Jakob did, too. Mutti's youngest sister, Käthe—Mutti called her the baby—moved to Amsterdam and married a Dutch man, Isaak Wurms. Their only child, my only real cousin, Aaltje, was born in Holland on August 21, 1939, when Holland still seemed like a safe country for Jews.

At the end of October 1939, shortly after Aaltje's birth, Mutti, Papa and I, a six-year old "adventurer," escaped from Germany. It all began with a visit to Mutti's relatives in Amsterdam. We stayed with Tante

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Yizkor — Remembrance

by Suzanne Batzdorff, Holocaust survivor, mother, and long time member of Congregation Beth Ami in Santa Rosa, California

*All my life
I've stored up memories
Of pleasures and pains,
Of rooms and houses,
Gardens and playgrounds,
Of people, yes, those
Have been the most vivid.*

*The board games we played
With Grandma,
Stale chocolate she would bestow on us
Before bedtime,
Her slow, measured steps
And labored breath,
And her words, "Go with God,"
Whenever we went out.*

*Memories are
What keeps them alive,
Those who have left us forever.
While memories live
In our hearts, in our minds,
Our loved ones are with us,
And every so often,
A gesture, a tone of voice,
A shrug of the shoulder,
A toss of the head
Recalls in an instant
The one who spoke,
Who gestured,
Who smiled like that.*

*We smile at the memory,
Not quite sure
Whether a tear might not be
More appropriate.*

*Death is a farewell, a good-bye,
But not quite, not yet.
While someone in this world
Remembers,
Death has not won the battle.*

Suzanne Batzdorff



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The Holocaust Bnai Mitzvah Project

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A Survivor Prepares Memorial Pages

The names that the **Remember Us Project** sends to bar/bat mitzvah students come from a data base. The memorial process for each lost child begins when each name, one at a time, is transferred to a Memorial Page. Six wonderful volunteers create the Memorial Pages.

Ruth Turner, a survivor of the European upheavals, is one of our volunteer writers. Ruth volunteers in order to keep alive the memories of those who perished in the Holocaust. As a survivor herself she is committed to giving something back wherever and whenever she can.

Ruth was born in Berlin. By 1939 it was clear to her family that they had to leave Germany as soon as possible. Israel and all of the countries in Europe and the Americas were closed to them. The only escape route they could find was to Shanghai, China. The family used all of their connections, bribery, and other means to obtain passports.

In March Ruth traveled to Shanghai with her parents, her grandmother, and aunt and her family. They arrived in a third world country rampant with poverty and disease. Ruth remembers the occasional apple her mother would bring home, and cut in quarters, to savor and enjoy, one quarter each evening; the small apartment they all lived in together; and the many friends all living in the same meager conditions, creating a supportive community. This was their their home for ten years.

There was a United States Army Barracks across the street from their



Ruth Turner

apartment. One Shabbat evening a passing soldier saw the Shabbat candles in their window and knocked on their door. He became a friend who helped them obtain papers and sponsored them come to the United States. Because of quotas they could not come directly and first went to Montreal and then Vancouver, Canada in 1949. Finally in 1951 they were able to come to San Francisco.

Ruth now lives in Santa Rosa, California, with her daughter's family and three grandchildren close by. Her cousins (the children of her aunt) and their children live in the Bay Area as well. Ruth is director of the local Jewish center and a valued volunteer for many local organizations, including Congregation Shomrei Torah and Jewish Family and Childrens' Services. And on a regular basis she makes time to prepare Memorial Pages for the rising generation of Jewish children. ■

laureate scientist? Or, might she have become a housewife caring for her own children and grandchildren? She might have grown old, just as I did. She might have grown old with me to become my only cousin—just six years my junior. Parents gone. Uncles and aunts gone. Cousin Aaltje, gone. I am an only child. All I have left is the photograph of a child who did not survive the Holocaust. My second grandchild, Zoe Summit, celebrated her Bat Mitzvah on March 17, 2007. Zoe decided to partner with "Remember Us: The Holocaust B'nai Mitzvah Project" to honor a child, one of the 1.5 million, who did not survive the Holocaust. Each Bnai Mitzvah youngster is assigned a child who perished in the Shoah. Zoe, like other program participants, integrated "her" child into her own ceremony and said Kaddish, the mourning prayer, on the day of her Bat Mitzvah and will again, each year, on the anniversary of that day as well as each year on Yom HaShoah, the day of Holocaust remembrance. When she read from the Torah she spoke with two voices: her own and that of the child she honored on this special day. Zoe has given her selected child the gift of Bat Mitzvah.

Zoe specifically selected a Dutch child named Aaltje Wurms. Zoe's congregation, Temple Emanuel of Worcester, MA, provided a bracelet with Aaltje's name, a bracelet that honors Aaltje and reminds Zoe of my cousin—and Zoe's cousin, although several generations removed. ■



Cousin Aaltje 1939-1943

Connecting the Generations *Continued from page 2*

Käthe and Onkel Isaak where I met Aaltje for the first and only time. I held the baby with great love. Everyone reminded me often that this was my only cousin. I couldn't really play with this babe of two months. How does one "play" with a newborn? At best, one shakes a rattle in hopes of eliciting a gurgle. Did we roll on the carpet? Did I teach her a song? Surely, it was the clichéd love at first sight. Early in November of 1939, my parents and I found our way to Antwerp, Belgium. I remember none of that journey which lasted only a few days. Some trains. Some walking. No other memories. I already missed

Aaltje. The Nazis invaded Holland on May 10, 1940. We don't know the details of the family's suffering. Years later, however, while studying records at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, I learned that on February 19, 1943, Aaltje, with her twenty-nine year old mother, died at Auschwitz. The Nazi killers had kept scrupulous documentation in a clear script. Aaltje's age at the time of her murder: 3½.

What can I tell about Aaltje Wurms? All I remember is that she was small, an infant, when I saw her last. I can only imagine her life story; what might have been. Might she have become an Anne Frank? A Nobel

Children Research History to Give Voice to Lives Lived and Lost

Several years ago, after listening to stories from their own grandparents and other elders in their communities about childhood friends and neighbors who did not survive World War II, Czech students realized that there was much about their towns' histories that they were not being taught. Consequently, they decided to trace the histories of these "neighbors who disappeared." Using eye witness accounts and local chronicles, visiting local cemeteries, and researching other documents, students compiled a history of local families that went missing during World War II.

The result is *Neighbors Who Disappeared*, an exhibit of 19 mixed-media panels and accompanying lessons that is now touring the United States. Czech children and youth (ages 12-21) created a remarkable exhibit reflecting on the history of the Nazi Holocaust, as it affected their own cities and towns. The collages combine text, drawings, paintings, contemporary and historical photographs, and facsimiles of historical documents. The 19 panels vary in style and focus. Some are powerful journalistic and historical documentaries, with an abundance of factual detail, others are highly stylized artistic expressions.

The exhibit seeks to come to terms with the question: why were fellow citizens persecuted and how could it have been avoided?

The *Neighbors Who Disappeared*



the voiceless, the same impulse that is at the heart of the **Remember Us Project**. It shows how students, using a little initiative, their abundant energy, and natural curiosity can educate themselves and others. These students gained an understanding of Czech history, European history, and a larger perspective on world history, and they have actually helped author that history through the exhibition.

Neighbors Who Disappeared is a project of the Jewish Museum in Prague and the Forgotten Ones Civic Association. They are pleased to present it in the United States. A web site complete with downloadable versions of the exhibit panels in English can be found at <http://biokin.org/nwd/hosts.html>. Additional English-language texts can be found at the project web site, www.zmizeli-sousede.cz.

Letter from an Individual Donor

I've just been through the whole web site and I felt moved from the first page. I felt the power of what you are doing, the importance and the simplicity of it. The idea of saying Kaddish for these children for the rest of one's life, that's so deep and beautiful.

I like the way you describe the project as an opportunity for B'nai Mitzvot to enhance their educational experience to include committed Jewish action. It's a call to reach back, to not forget, to weave past and future, to go out into the world and tell the lost stories. Very inspiring.

I also like the reference to its being a healing, redemptive activity. It's especially important because so often Bar/Bat Mitzvah kids are cashing in and getting feted; the remembering adds a deeper dimension, a gravitas.

I will encourage our niece (Bat Mitzvah in fall 2008) and others to look at your website. I am so moved by your work and its extraordinary importance.

B'Shalom,
Corisa



project proceeded in two phases. The first 12 panels of this exhibit were created between 1998 and 2000. Children and youth from 12 cities around the country supplied their stories, transcripts of interview, photographs, and other archival materials. Staff designers at the Jewish Museum of Prague created the display panels.

The second phase of the project is titled *A Tribute to the Child Victims of the Holocaust*. The focus is specifically on the stories of Jewish children, particularly those who attended the same school as the children and youth creating their panels. The graphic art and panel layouts were created entirely by the young researchers and artists themselves.

The exhibition demonstrates the ability of students to give a voice to