

Educators, Students Meet Six Local Holocaust Survivors at Stockton University Event

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Galloway Township, NJ – “I’ve never met a Holocaust survivor before,” said Sparkle Prevard, a Stockton University student from Atlantic City.

Today, she met six.

Prevard was among the students and educators who attended a luncheon to meet New Jersey Holocaust survivors Rosalie and Sidney Simon of Margate, who have been married for 63 years, Donald Berkman of Margate, Hanna Ehrlich of Margate, Elizabeth Blum Goldstein of Cherry Hill and Ruth Kessler of Ventnor.

The survivors came to Stockton University for a luncheon where they met about 75 educators from 40 New Jersey school districts and Stockton students. The event was part of a two-day seminar, “Holocaust and Human Behavior,” sponsored by Stockton’s Sara and Sam Schoffer Holocaust Resource Center and Facing History and Ourselves.

Chelsea Regan, of Bayville, NJ, a senior double majoring in Theater Design and Production and Sculpture, first became aware of survivor Elizabeth Blum Goldstein’s story as the Stockton theater stage manager for the play “A Comb and a Prayer Book,” which is Blum Goldstein’s memoir created with the help of her granddaughter Shana Shah, of Philadelphia.

It wasn’t until today that Regan, who is minoring in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, met Blum Goldstein and Shah in person. Regan posed for a picture with Blum Goldstein, who paused to roll up her sleeve to show the numbers permanently engraved onto her forearm. “Let me make it more real,” said Blum Goldstein.

Susanne Pfaff-Manzini, of Northfield, NJ, an eighth-grade English teacher at Belhaven Middle School, is a Stockton graduate who has been teaching Holocaust materials for many years. “Stockton has always been generous to local teachers. We are very fortunate,” she said.

The memoir genre is of particular interest to Pfaff-Manzini who explained that it works well for eighth-graders “who want to connect with real stories and real people.”

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The Holocaust is an overwhelming subject, but a story can help students connect with it on a more personal level, she explained.

Terry Kuhnreich, a teacher at Vineland Regional High School South, was raised by Holocaust survivors. She lost her father, Jacob, at age 108 two years ago. Her father and her mother, Marie, both survived the Holocaust, as well as her in-laws.

Maryann McLaughlin, assistant supervisor of the Holocaust Resource Center, is working on a memoir detailing Kuhnreich's father's story.

Kuhnreich teaches the Search for Conscience curriculum, which Vineland attorney and former Vineland High School history teacher Harry Furman helped to create.

All teachers received copies of each survivor's memoir. Maddy and Harvey Rovinsky of Longport, NJ, co-sponsored the Holocaust survivor memoir gifts for each educator, along with the Charles W. Lewis Middle School in Blackwood, NJ, which made a donation in honor of retiring teacher Randi Posner of Northfield, NJ.

Harvey Rovinsky made his connection to Stockton's Holocaust Resource Center through Director Gail Rosenthal. "Gail is magnetic," he said.

Holocaust education is "crucial for our country and young people," he said, adding that "there are still people who don't believe the Holocaust happened."

"There is limited time to meet survivors. It's likely this is the last time to see this," he said as he watched a line of teachers meet individually with the six survivors who personally handed each teacher a signed memoir.

Never again will not be a reality unless we get this message out, he explained.

Maddy Rovinsky said of the survivors, "Their resiliency is incredible."

She was amazed at how they could still smile. So many were able to turn shattered lives into new ones, she said.

Lucinda Bernstein, of Bridgeton, NJ, a teacher at Downe Township Elementary School and Cumberland Regional High School, explained that the most shocking thought she will take home today is the fact that such a small group, the 15 Nazi leaders who determined The Final Solution, could have such a dark impact.

The vast number, 6 million victims, is the hardest part for her students to grasp. To help them better understand, she focuses on the 1.5 million children. She calculated with her students how many years it would take to gather 1.5 million children, if the Nazis took 180 children per day. One hundred and eighty is the number of students at Downe Township Elementary School. It would take the Nazis more than two decades.

"Every experience here [at Stockton] is phenomenal," Bernstein said.