

Students Get a First-Hand Perspective

Story and photographs by Erin Thibault, senior

On the 12th of February members of the Global Perspectives and German IV classes took a trip to the Goodwin Holocaust Museum in Cherry Hill. The focus of this trip was the two guest speakers that addressed the students, Mrs. Kalina and Mr. Bielec. The first speaker was Mrs. Leah Kalina. Originally from Czechoslovakia, her family moved to Germany and, during WWII, was imprisoned in a Nazi death camp. Mrs. Kalina arrived at Auschwitz with her three sisters, mother, and father. Immediately she was separated from two of her sisters and both of her parents, who she would never see them again.

Mrs. Kalina spoke elegantly in reference to a statement by Chain Ginotti; he said, "I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, and babies shot and buried by high school and college and college graduates. So, I am suspicious of education." She drew from this statement her hope that even the most educated people of the future will learn from those who preceded them in history. She also spoke about her escape during a death march, her reunion with one of her sisters, and her chance to live in the United States.

After Mrs. Kalina finished speaking, the students went downstairs to view the museum. It's a modest museum, but it is a place that all of the people at the center are extremely proud of. They had many different photographs and artifacts. Members of the community donated most of the authentic artifacts to the museum. There is also a lot of original artwork created by people affected in some way by the events of the Holocaust.

After the tour of the museum the students heard from the second speaker. His name was Mr. Bill Bielec, and he was an officer in the United States Army in WWII, and was also a concentration camp liberator. Mr. Bielec spoke with such passion about his life during the war. Most of the stories that he talked about referred to the super top-secret information that he was trusted with. One thing that he focused on was his part in the D-Day invasion. He was one of the few people who knew the actual time and place that the invasion would take place. Also, he tried to convey to all the students the massive scale of the attack, and the reality and the danger of full-fledged warfare.

The students really enjoyed all the different war stories that Mr. Bielec told, and it was evident that he could have shared his life story with them all day if not for the time restraint. "The whole trip was very



Figure 1 "Arbeit Macht Frei" (Work Brings Freedom) was the sign over the gates of Auschwitz. It was placed there by Major Rudolf Hoss, commandant of the camp. Above on the left is a replica of one of the gates at Auschwitz donated to the museum by a local artist. On the right is a photograph of one of the actual gates.



Figure 2 Above is the group shot taken at the museum with the global perspectives and global seminar classes, Mr. Bielec and Mrs. Kalina.

insightful. It was interesting to hear a first-hand account rather than just stories,” said senior Paul Mullen. After the museum, the group went to lunch at Corolla’s in Marlton before they returned home with a new perspective of this event in history.