LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE PAST TO CREATE A SAFER, BETTER FUTURE

Holocaust Commemoration 2017

Sunday 29th January at 1:00 pm
Holocaust Memorial Day takes place on 27 January each year. The 27th January marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945, the largest Nazi death camp.

It’s a time for everyone to pause to remember the millions of people who have been murdered or whose lives have been changed beyond recognition during the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. On Holocaust Memorial Day we can honour the survivors of these regimes and challenge ourselves to use the lessons of their experience to inform our lives today.

How can life go on?

“How can life go on?” is the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2017.

The aftermath of the Holocaust and of subsequent genocides continues to raise challenging questions for individuals, communities and nations. HMD 2017 asks audiences to think about what happens after genocide and of our own responsibilities in the wake of such a crime. This year’s theme is broad and open ended, there are few known answers.

Author and survivor of the Holocaust Elie Wiesel has said:

“For the survivor death is not the problem. Death was an everyday occurrence. We learned to live with Death. The problem is to adjust to life, to living. You must teach us about living.”
Holocaust Memorial Day 2017

How can life go on?

Holocaust Commemoration Council Chamber, The Cube, Parklands Gateway, Corby
What is genocide?

The term ‘genocide’ was first used in 1933, in a paper presented to the League of Nations by the Polish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin. He devised the concept in response to the atrocities perpetrated against the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, between 1915 and 1918.

On 11 December 1946 the General Assembly of the United Nations resolved that genocide was a crime under international law. This was approved and ratified as a Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide on 9 December 1948.

The Convention defines genocide as:

‘any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- killing members of the group
- causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

A number of specific actions have been deemed to be punishable under the Convention. These are:

- genocide
- conspiracy to commit genocide
- direct and public incitement to commit genocide
- attempt to commit genocide
- complicity in genocide

Actions do not need to lead to deaths to be considered to be acts of genocide – causing serious bodily or mental harm or the deprivation of resources such as clean water, food, shelter or medical services can be regarded as inflicting conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction. Causing serious bodily or mental harm includes the infliction of widespread torture, rape and sexual violence. It is also a criminal offence to plan or incite genocide – even before the killing starts. This recognises that genocide does not just happen. There is always a path that leads to genocide.
Starving prisoners in Mauthausen camp liberated on 5 May 1945

Budapest, Hungary—Captured Jewish women in Wesselényi Street, 20–22 October 1944.
Programme

*Entrance to Film Music by John Williams from Schindler's List*

**Welcome**
The Mayor, Councillor Julie Riley

**Introduction**
Councillor Elise Elliston

**Selected Readings**
Lodge Park Academy Students

**Guest Speaker**
Susi Bechhofer

Question and Answer Session

*Two minute reflection with music from ‘Schinder's List Theme’*

Councillor Judy Caine & Paul Balmer

**Selected Readings**
Lodge Park Academy Students

**Concluding Remarks**
Councillor Elise Elliston

*Final reflection music ‘Shalom Chaverim’*

Councillor Judy Caine & Paul Balmer

**Close**

*Exit to further music by John Williams*

**Thank you for your attendance**

*Light refreshments will be served outside the Council Chamber*
Undoubtedly the most powerful contribution which can be made to an event like this one is from a survivor of the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution, or subsequent genocides.

Today we extend a very warm welcome to our guest Susi Bechhofer who has kindly agreed to share her story with us.
Susi Bechhofer
Susi Bechhofer - Biography

Susi and her twin, Lotte, were born in 1936 in Munich, Germany. Their mother, Rosa, was a Jewish domestic servant, and their father, who was a member of the Nazi party, left Munich before they were born. Rosa was unable to cope with the demands of two babies and working and so gave the children to the local orphanage, where she visited them once a week. On 16th May 1939, Susi and Lotte were sent to Britain on the Kindertransport. They were taken to Cardiff and the home of devout Baptists Edward and Irene Mann.

Edward was a Reverend, and had a reputation as a fundamentalist preacher. Those taking in Kindertransport children had to agree not to try and convert the children, but to endeavour to maintain their Jewish identity. However, the Manns soon had the girls baptised and changed their names. Susi Bechhofer became Grace Mann, while her sister became Eunice. Reverend Mann went as far as insisting that the children were his biological children. When rumours began to circulate a few years later that they were adopted, he quickly had them moved to a private school some distance from their home and church, where people would not know anything of the family’s background.

In 1945, Eunice developed a brain tumour. The Manns decided it would be better for Grace to be away from the stress of seeing her sister ill, so she was sent to a boarding school in Somerset, before moving to a Christian boarding school in North Wales. Although the Manns had called her Grace since she had been with them, her name change was not legal at that time.

In 1954, she entered the school hall to sit an English Literature exam, the students lining up in alphabetical order. Susi was standing with the ‘Ms’, when her teacher took her to one side and said she should stand with the ‘Bs’, as her legal name was Susi Bechhofer. During the exam she was unable to write anything, thinking only about the foreign name she had been told was hers. The name stirred vague memories for her. By the end of the exam however, she had decided that she did not want to find out about Susi Bechhofer and would remain Grace Mann. Later, Reverend Mann told her she was adopted but that she could not tell anyone.

At the age of 18, Grace began a nursing course in Essex putting more distance between herself and her family, including her sister who by now was very ill. After graduating from nursing school she began work as a midwife. In 1964, she met Alan, who she married in 1966, having a son
10 months later. It was with the birth of her own child that she began to question her real identity. The Manns had told her that the orphanage in Munich where she had spent her early childhood had burnt down, but she now began to question this. These thoughts distressed her so much that a few weeks after giving birth she admitted herself to hospital on the verge of a nervous breakdown. On leaving hospital she devoted herself to nursing and refused to think about her mother, ignoring the thoughts until Eunice died aged 35.

Grace now tried to find out more about their identity, knowing that Eunice had not been able to. In 1987, Grace retired from nursing, devoting her time to finding out the truth about her past. After much searching and many false leads, she finally learned who her parents were. She discovered that her mother had been deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943, where she died, and that she had a half sister, from whom Susi was able to find out more about their father. She also learned that she had many cousins, mainly in America, all of whom were Orthodox Jews.

Finding out her real identity inspired Susi to learn more about Judaism but she realised that after a life spent practising Christianity she did not want to change her religion. She did, however, want to change her name, and in 1988 she changed it back to Susi Bechhofer. Susi’s story was the basis of the novel Austerlitz by W.G. Sebald, and her story is told in Rosa’s Child, by Jeremy Josephs and Susi Bechhofer. She now talks to groups about her experiences during and after the Holocaust.

*Kindertransport statue at Liverpool Street Station, London*
About Holocaust Memorial Day and Holocaust Memorial Day Trust

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) is the charity which promotes and supports Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD). The 27th January is the day for everyone to remember the millions of people killed in the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The 27th January marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi death camp in the Second World War.

On HMD we can honour the survivors of these regimes of hatred and challenge ourselves to use the lessons of their experience to inform our lives today.

HMD is a time when we seek to learn the lessons of the past and to recognise that genocide does not just take place on its own, it is a steady process which can begin if discrimination, racism and hatred are not checked and prevented. We are fortunate here in the United Kingdom; we are not at risk of genocide. Discrimination has not ended, however, nor has the use of the language of hatred or exclusion. There is still much to do to create a safer future and HMD is an opportunity to start this process.

The aims of HMD are laid out in our statement of commitment. HMD activity organisers bring together the diverse strands of their communities to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day in their neighbourhoods. This is a real demonstration of how lessons of the past can inform our lives today and ensure that everyone works together to create a safer, better future.

www.hmd.org.uk
Corby Borough Council wishes to thank -

**Susi Bechhofer** for her attendance today

Councillor Elise Elliston

Lodge Park Academy

Councillor Judy Caine & Paul Balmer

Councillor Matt Reay

Ian Loveland & Corby Library

Holocaust Educational Trust

Staff in Democratic Services, ICT and Facilities Management

**Thank you for joining in our event.**

*Articles and images courtesy of Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) and Holocaust Educational Trust (HET)*

CORBY BOROUGH COUNCIL 2017