



Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre

Newsletter

Winter 2011 - 2012

MHMC Features: A New Website for Human Rights

For almost two years now, the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre (MHMC) has been more deeply engaged in human rights issues. Amongst other Initiatives, the MHMC promotes involvement of young adults from the broader Montreal community. To further this work, the Human Rights Committee will soon launch its brand new website.

Entitled « Standing up for human rights », this website aims to inform visitors not only about current human rights efforts, but particularly about what they can do. The first section highlights women and men who resisted the Nazi regime by protecting their fellow Jewish citizens, and who are Righteous Among the Nations. Their courage and dedication is still a source of inspiration today. The second section brings together MHMC partner organizations as well as profiles of outstanding Montrealers engaged in human rights issues through all sorts of means, including education, music and dance. Finally, the site encourages visitors to get involved. It features a calendar of events where our partners will announce their events and a forum where all will share their viewpoints on various current issues.

We are pleased to invite you to the launch of this brand new multimedia platform on January 19th, 2012. Details will follow shortly. Join us and together we can "stand up for human rights"!



Become a guide at the MHMC

The next guide training session will begin in January 2012 and will be presented in French. Those interested in joining our group of guides must speak French and be available to guide tours during the day on weekdays. Bilingualism and knowledge of the subject matter are assets. Those interested in taking part are requested to complete the registration form on our website. Spaces is limited and the choice of candidates will be based on their availability, motivation, experience and interest in the subject.



Memory at your fingertips: January 26, 2012

To mark the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, in partnership with the National Theater School, the Centre is offering a very special tour of the Museum on **January 26 as of 6:30 pm**. Julie Guinard, Museum & Collection Coordinator, is bringing some items out of the displays & archives to share them with the public. Our guides will tell you the history of these objects and the stories behind them and to those whom they once belonged. Enjoy this unique opportunity for a "behind the scenes" look. **More information will follow on our website.**

A Look Into our Collection:

The prisoner jacket of Irma (known as Imy) Nemenoff-Gellert, is a new acquisition for the Collection. This rare object of great symbolic value is only the fourth prison uniform given to the Centre.

The uniforms used by the Nazis in concentration camps or labor camps were made by prisoners in camps like Dachau and Ravensbrück. These workshops were making uniforms that looked similar but were not identical, differing in their colors and shapes. The uniforms for women (one third of the camp prisoners) are shaped like jackets, while men's uniforms have the form of shirts. The uniforms were produced in different sizes, but the size is not indicated on the garment. By examining a uniform, we discover the alterations made to fit the size of the prisoner. Imy's uniform has been modified by sewing darts on the back and front. Finally, each uniform is marked with the prisoner's identification number. The number "U609" sewn on Imy's uniform identifies her as a Hungarian prisoner. The uniforms of concentration camps are among the symbols most often associated with the Holocaust. To the public which has seen them in film and archival material, they are easily recognizable. Today, few of these symbols of hatred and dehumanization are left: many uniforms were abandoned or destroyed after the liberation of the camps, especially for reasons of hygiene. For survivors who have kept theirs, they are evidence of the torture suffered and symbols of resilience. For visitors to our Museum, they become means to learn the history of the Holocaust and to reflect on the dangers of racism and intolerance.

Imy Nemenoff-Gellert was born in 1914 into a Jewish family in Lugoj, Hungary (now Romania). In May 1944 she was arrested with her husband and sent to a prison. She was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau (Poland) on June 11, 1944. After five months of hard labor in the Auschwitz camp, Imy was transferred to the Mauthausen camp (Austria) where she remained prisoner until May 5, 1945, when the camp was liberated by the U.S. forces.

The Centre wishes to thank Imy and her daughter Michele Blask for their generosity and support.



Top Left: Imy (18 months) and her grandfather c.1916; **Bottom left:** Imy after the war c.1946; **Top right:** Imy Nemenoff-Gellert's prisoner jacket; **Bottom right:** Imy (right) donates her jacket to Julie Guinard, the MHMC's Museum & Collection coordinator in September 2011

The Centre is actively looking for objects, documents and photographs for its collection in order to pursue its work of remembrance and Holocaust education to a wider audience and to meet the demands of researchers, historians and other interested museums. If you would like to contribute to the Centre's collection by donating an object or document, please contact the MHMC's Museum & Collection Coordinator Julie Guinard at (514) 345-2605 ext 3022 or by email julie.guinard@mhmc.ca.

The International Seminar for Educators in Yad Vashem

by Sabrina Moisan, Education Coordinator

Last July, I had the chance to participate in the International Seminar for educators offered by Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, thanks to a scholarship from the Tauben Foundation and the Jewish Community Foundation. In total, we were 42 educators, teachers and Holocaust museum professionals (Washington, Houston, Montreal), from Canada and the United States primarily, but also from India and Eastern Europe. For three weeks we learned about Jewish life and culture before the Second World War, antisemitism, the Holocaust and current related issues. Renowned professors, including Yehuda Bauer and Alan Rosen, presented results of their research and shared their passion for Jewish history. This special seminar will certainly help me better support teachers here, in developing training and tools which are better adapted to their needs.

In addition to being located on a beautiful site with a stunning view over the city, Yad Vashem is a museum of history which is impressive both in its content and its architecture. Several memorials and sculptures accompany the walker and contribute to the mood of contemplation that the site inspires. In my free time I visited the gallery called "Art during the Holocaust," which brings together artistic works by Jews during the Holocaust. It was a highlight of my stay. Culture and daily life during the years of the Holocaust are beautifully represented. The talent and depth of the ideas expressed in these pictures on the walls were overwhelming. I came back convinced that art can really play a role in the study of the Holocaust. Moreover, the seminar included a "discovery" aspect that included several field trips to learn about Israel. We had a chance to float in the Dead Sea, to taste kosher wines from the Golan Heights, to sleep in a Kibbutz, to visit Massada and several other places. It was an unforgettable experience and I wish the same to all teachers in Quebec! **The submission of applications for Yad Vashem grants will start in February, watch for it on our website.**



A Few Highlights

Annual General Meeting:

On September 20, the Centre held its Annual General Meeting which was well attended. Among other business, members elected a new board of directors, including its new President, Larry Nachshen. New Board Members include Yvonne Bensimon, Frederick Guillaume Dufour, Hanna Eliashiv, and Daniel Rabinowicz. The Centre honored Susyn Borer, Past President, to show its gratitude for her dedication in continuing to advance the Centre's mission. The Centre also honored the following volunteers for their extraordinary dedication: Aba Beer, Paula Bultz, Baruch Cohen, Joseph Fishman, Thomas Hecht, Olga Sher and Marcia Shuster.

A successful Teachers Conference:

On October 27 the Centre held the second edition of our Teachers' conference. Over 125 teachers attended twenty presentations and workshops about the challenges, opportunities and successes of teaching the Holocaust and other genocides. University professors, representatives of the Ministère de l'éducation, du sport et des loisirs and several teachers from all levels presented their work, practices and thoughts on this question. It was an opportunity to share with colleagues, learn new approaches and to stimulate interest in teaching the Holocaust in Quebec. A professional development day worth repeating!

Holocaust Education Series:

The Centre has just completed the 14th Holocaust Education Series, and we are busy evaluating and brainstorming the possibilities for 2012. Without a doubt, we will be maintaining the Museum Open House and survivor testimonies which captivated 130 people each Sunday! We wish to thank all the volunteers, guides, survivors and world-renowned speakers who each year contribute to our success in reaching a very broad audience with programming (films, conferences, workshops, panel discussions) which link the Holocaust and contemporary issues.

Kristallnacht Commemoration:

The yearly Kristallnacht commemoration organised by the Centre took place on November 9th in the Beth Israel Beth Aaron Synagogue. The program included a musical performance: works by Ernest Bloch, Maurice Ravel and Max Bruch were performed by two members of the World Symphony Orchestra. The commemoration was very well attended. In addition to the general public numerous representatives of the government and the diplomatic corps were present.



From top to bottom: Larry Nachshen, Incoming President honouring Susyn Borer, outgoing President at the Annual General Meeting; Charles Heimberg presenting at the opening session of the Teacher's Conference; Musical program at this year's Kristallnacht Commemoration.

In other news...

The Centre has been successful in obtaining several grants which will significantly increase our ability to preserve and document Holocaust collections and make those collections accessible to the public. The grants include:

- Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine to develop multi-media guides, on iPad or similar technology for self-guided and thematic tours of the Museum;
- Museum Assistance Program, Canadian Heritage, to reorganize and better protect the collection in storage;
- The Azrieli Foundation, to digitize the video testimony collections of Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives and McGill University Living Testimonies, as well as to index and document part of those collections. A part of the MHMC Museum artifact collection not in the permanent exhibition will also be digitized and documented.

Legacy Campaign: The Time is Now Several generous donors have made arrangements for planned gifts to the Centre, to assure the transmission of memory and the pursuit of education on the Holocaust and prevention of human rights violations in the future. Have you considered a legacy gift to endow this important mission? Please call Executive Director, Alice Herscovitch (514) 345-2605 for more information.

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