

Students absorb Holocaust horror

Windsor youths moved by survivor's story

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In the 62 years since Susan Taube was liberated from a Nazi extermination camp, the horrible details of the Holocaust sometimes dissolve into a jumbled blur of unbearable memories.

But if there's one thing the 81-year-old survivor will always remember, it is the ease with which the Nazis killed. Whether it was shooting an elderly woman for becoming too ill to sweep sidewalks in the Jewish ghetto, or shipping thousands to die in a gas chamber, the Nazis murdered with a casual indifference to their victims' humanity.

"People were killed for no reason," Taube told a group of 250 Canadian students who were visiting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington on Tuesday. "They just took the gun, and you were shot."

Taube's harrowing account of a childhood spent living through "different phases of hell" in Hitler's Europe prompted an emotional response from her teenage audience, in Washington as part of the Ager Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program.

Many of the students, already deeply moved after touring the museum exhibits, crowded around Taube for impromptu hugs and expressions of gratitude. "It's really important to meet people like her, because we are the last generation who will get to hear the stories of Holocaust survivors first hand," said 15-year-old Meghan Plotnick, a Grade 10 student from Vincent Massey secondary school in Windsor.

"It's up to us to carry on the message of the Holocaust to make sure it will never happen again."

For the young Canadians, Taube's speech capped 18 hours of intensive study designed to raise their awareness of the Holocaust and the need to fight racism and religious intolerance.

"The message I take is that this should never be done again," said Alexander Paolozzi, a 17-year-old from Toronto.

Paolozzi and several other students drew parallels between the Holocaust and modern-day genocides in places like Rwanda and Darfur.



WITNESS TO EVIL: Holocaust survivor Susan Taube spoke to Canadian students Tuesday in Washington.

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"The most important thing to take out of this experience is that education is the most powerful tool against hatred," said Lyndon Lyons, 15, also from Vincent Massey. "The only way to prevent another Holocaust is to educate people so they know the consequences of racism and stereotypes and discrimination."

Jennifer Cabral, a 17-year-old Toronto student, said she was shocked that world leaders have been so slow to take action in Darfur.

"After the experience of the Holocaust, you would think the world would be more aware of what's occurring," Cabral said.

The Canadian teens toured the Holocaust Museum, which tells the story of six million victims. They stood in a cattle car used to ship Jews to extermination camps, saw the piles of shoes collected from victims before they entered the gas chambers, and heard voice recordings of survivors.

"We tell our stories because the world has to know," said Taube.