

Holocaust students learn from survivor

BY SHELDON ALBERTS
CanWest News Service

WASHINGTON — 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 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 visiting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington yesterday. "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 Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies Program.

"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 Meghan Plotnick, 15, a Grade 10 student from Vincent Massey secondary school in Windsor, Ont.



Susan Taube:
'Phases of hell'
Getty

For the young Canadians, Taube's speech capped 18 hours of study designed to raise their awareness of the Holocaust and of the need to fight racism and religious intolerance in the 21st century.

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

"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 of Windsor's Vincent Massey school.

"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 student from Marshall McLuhan, 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 spent several hours this week touring the Holocaust museum, which tells the story of six million victims through photographs, artifacts and the personal effects of the dead.

The students 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, who was born in the German town of Vacha, where her family had lived for 400 years. "These children listened to me and they can say 'I met a survivor. She was real. She was there.'"

Taube's father escaped to the United States before the Second World War, but her grandmother, mother and sister all died during a decade-long ordeal that began in the 1930s.