



Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society

For Education and Remembrance

Volume 1, Number 3

Spring 1990

Tribute To Survivors

May 24th, 1990

It is with great pleasure that the Vancouver Holocaust Centre Society, together with Schara Tzedek Synagogue, announces an evening of tribute on May 24 in honour of our community's Survivors who have been actively participating in various programs of Holocaust documentation, education and remembrance.

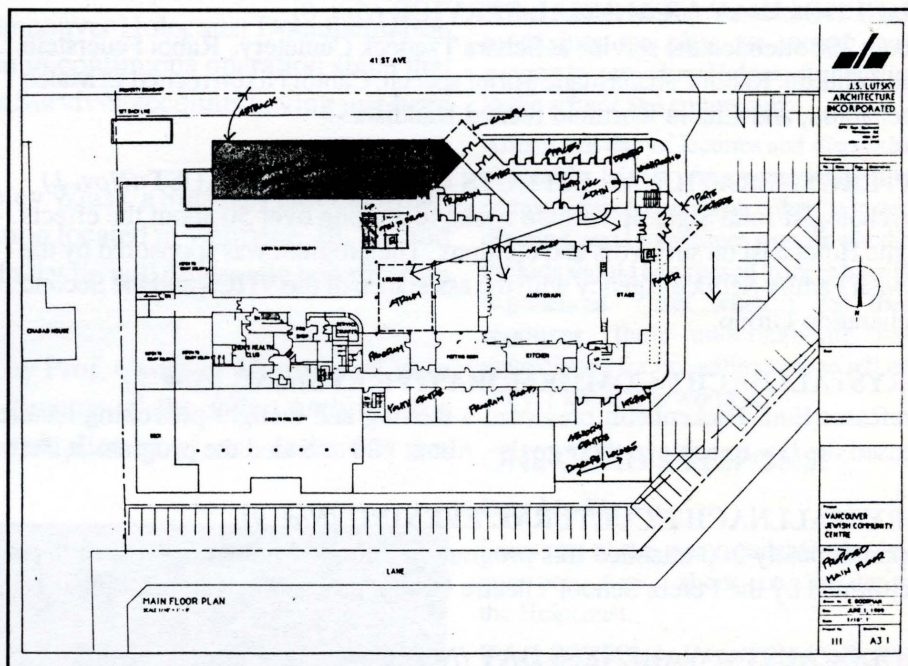
Since 1975, several dozen Survivors have been featured speakers to over 25,000 high school students at the annual Symposium on the Holocaust at UBC as well as in the VHCS outreach program. Another 90 Survivors have given their eyewitness testimony to the events of the Holocaust for the audio-visual documentation project. Still others have been involved in commemorative events and the building of the monument.

The Tribute Evening will be addressed by Dr. Leon Bass, a liberator of Buchenwald, and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin of Israel, both spell-binding orators on the subject of the Shoah. All Survivors, their families and the community are invited to attend, May 24, at 7:30 p.m. in the sanctuary of Schara Tzedek Synagogue.

Progress on Phase III !

By Robert Krell, Chairman

Below you will see a small architectural rendering of the space proposed for the permanent site of the Vancouver Holocaust Centre at the Jewish Community Centre. Recently, progress in establishing this long-awaited and much needed facility has accelerated. Initial meetings within the Survivor community have indicated great enthusiasm in supporting such an education and program centre as a legacy to succeeding generations.



The Centre, when built, will house an exhibition/administrative complex containing facilities to house permanent and temporary exhibits, a museum and archive of artifacts, the entire collection of audio-visual eyewitness accounts of Vancouver Survivors and others, as well as books, films and educational and research materials.

It has become common knowledge that Holocaust denial is a cornerstone of contemporary anti-Semitism. Documentation of personal accounts and continuing education are the antidote to this assault on Jewish collective memory. We look forward, as always, to your continuing support and involvement in our programs of sensitizing our communities to tolerance and justice. It is encouraging that in the reasonable future we will have a permanent home for these important activities.

VHCS FALL OFFICE NEWS — by Barry Dunner

YAD VASHEM — Dr. Krell and I met with Rabbi Menachem Fogel of Yad Vashem on his visit to Vancouver during the High Holidays. The outcome of the meeting was a reconfirmation of our relationship with Yad Vashem and Rabbi Fogel's offer of assistance in planning and conceptualizing the Holocaust Centre when the time comes.

HOLOCAUST CENTRES OF SAN FRANCISCO AND LOS ANGELES

On a recent trip to these cities, I had the opportunity to visit the Holocaust Centre of San Francisco, the Martyr's Memorial (Federation) and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, both in Los Angeles. The Directors of these centres, Joel Neuberg, Michael Nutkiewicz, and Rabbi Abraham Cooper were very supportive of our plans for creating a Holocaust centre in Vancouver and offered their assistance in this regard.

HOLOCAUST FALL PROGRAMMING

HIGH HOLIDAY MEMORIAL SERVICE (Oct. 8)

About 200 attended the service at Schara Tzedek Cemetery. Rabbi Feuerstein said Tehillim, Rabbi Cahana made a brief speech, Cantor Nixon recited El Maleh Rachamim, and Chaim Kornfeld recited Kaddish.

INTERGENERATIONAL EFFECTS OF THE HOLOCAUST (Nov. 1)

Psychologist John Sigal of Toronto spoke to a group over 50 about the effects of the Holocaust on survivors and children. The program was sponsored by the Jewish Family Service Agency with the assistance of the VHCS and the Second Generation Group.

KRYSTALLNACHT COMMEMORATIVE EVENING (Nov. 7)

Professor Emil Fackenheim presented a moving and thought-provoking lecture "Legalized Crime" on how the Nazis abused the law to achieve their goals. About 700 attended the program at Beth Israel.

KRYSTALLNACHT CULTURAL EVENING (Nov. 9)

Approximately 200 attended this program at Temple Sholom in which the play *The Dream of the Lost Children* was performed by the Peretz School Theatre Group, directed by Linda Goldhar Smith.

HOLOCAUST AWARENESS DAY (Nov. 12)

Planned by the Standing Committee on the Holocaust, this educational program for adults, teachers and the clergy took place at UBC. About 150 attended.

WINTER PROGRAMS

The Last Enemy

(February 1)

A VJCC program, assisted by us, the evening was a reading of Rhoda Kaellis' book, *The Last Enemy*, by the Peretz Institute drama students. A panel with Graham Forst and Rabbi Cahana followed.

March of the Living

(April 19 - May 1)

Is a Federation and UIA Canada sponsored tour of Poland and Israel for high school students. Eligibility criteria includes registration, an essay and assessment by local Federation committee.

VHCS board member Rubin Pinsky volunteered to sit on the selection committee on behalf of the Society. Several other board and society members assisted. Twenty-two students participated.

RECENT GIFTS

The office has recently received three photos from Bergen Belsen, taken shortly after liberation. The photos, two of which are shown here, were the property of Peter Gorst who was serving in the Canadian Army at that time.



This house belonged to Joseph Kramer, Commandant, and his companion Ilca Chase.



This gravesite contains 5,000 bodies of men and women.

Lessons and Legacies

Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World was the title of a conference held recently at Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois.

Dr. Robert Krell was invited to participate in this special gathering of 100 of the world's foremost Holocaust scholars.

The opening address, given by Prof. Raul Hilberg, author of *The Destruction of European Jewry*, initiated two days of intense discussion and review of scholarly work devoted to the Holocaust.

The keynote address, the only event open to the public, was delivered by Prof. Saul Friedlander of Tel Aviv University and of UCLA where he occupies the endowed chair of Holocaust Studies.

Dr. Krell and Prof. Peter Hayes of Northwestern were discussants at a panel entitled *Tellers and Listeners: the Impact of the Holocaust Narratives*. Dr. Krell initiated the Vancouver Holocaust Documentation Project in 1977. The project has been in continuous operation since that time — the 89th and 90th eye-witness Survivor accounts having just been taped last week.

The entire event was conceived by Ze'ev Weiss, a Survivor and chairman of the Holocaust Educational Foundation located in Wilmette, Ill. He and his committee deserve the gratitude of all who will ultimately benefit from these studies, said Krell.

The conference closed with remarks by Prof. Geoffrey Hartman of Yale University who is also the project director of the video archives for Holocaust testimony at Yale, where duplicates of our collection are housed.



Dr. Robert Krell and Prof. Raul Hilberg.

HOLOCAUST OUTREACH

Smithers, B.C.

By Barry Dunner

On Nov. 29, David Ehrlich and I travelled to Smithers to teach high school students about the Holocaust.

The trip came about because the students of Smithers Secondary School Theatre Department were planning to perform *I Never Saw Another Butterfly* — a play based on events at Theresienstadt, concentration camp for children.

In an effort to faithfully re-create the mood and environment of the camp, the school contacted the Jewish Resource Centre for information and materials on Jewish life and culture in pre-war Europe. On learning of this undertaking, I decided that if these students were committed enough to produce the play, we should show support by providing Holocaust education to the school and community.

After a full day of lectures and discussion about his life in Auschwitz and other camps, Ehrlich commented that "it is very draining, and I sometimes wonder whether the kids should be exposed to these horrific experiences. But when I see their responses, their understanding and appreciation for my willingness to tell my story, I know it is worth it."

ONE CHILD'S RESPONSE

Dear Mr. Ehrlich,

I was one of the many students who saw your presentation about your life during the Holocaust.

Being only fifteen, I wasn't very educated about the war and especially the Holocaust. I found your speech very informative and I will never forget it.

Thank you for being so brave. I know that it is very difficult to stand in front of people and express your feelings and tell a story of the worst thing that has affected us in the century.

I can only imagine how you felt while you were in the camp. I think what you are doing is one of the best things that a person can ever do to prevent it from happening again.

Sincerely,
Elge Tiamzon
Grade 9

MIRACLES OF THE HOLOCAUST

Two years ago, Rhoda Kaellis interviewed fifteen Victoria Holocaust survivors for documentation purposes. These interviews inspired her to write a novel about Holocaust survivors called *The Last Enemy*, which was published in October, 1989 by Pulp Press.

Now Mrs. Kaellis is collecting material for a sequel and is requesting help from survivors and children of survivors. She is interested in the specific area of what she calls "miracles".

Sample questions would include the following:

Among your experiences, does one event stand out as a miraculous aspect of your survival?

What special skills helped you to survive?

Were there apparently chance (miraculous) events that brought you together with those you thought lost or dead?

In rebuilding a family, did you experience miraculous events?

If you can help in this project, or know of someone who can, please contact Rhoda Kaellis 298-6622 anytime. Answering-machine messages will be answered promptly.

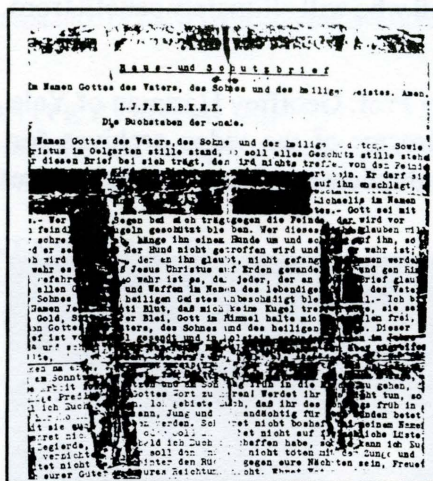
Mrs. Bronia Sonnenschein Replies

It was during our death-march from the forced labour camp in Dresden to Theresienstadt — we never knew, of course, the final destination — that something special occurred..

We had marched for almost two weeks. Countless people had already died on this march. My sister Paula and I decided to end it all. Marching along the river Elbe, drowning in it seemed to be the only way to end our misery. There was no more strength left in us, no end in sight to our suffering. We

confronted our mother with this plan and she agreed to it. She only begged us to wait one more day. "It will be Paula's birthday" she said. "Maybe a miracle will happen." It did. We entered Theresienstadt the next day. The Germans retreated and we were taken over by the Jewish Administration of the Ghetto in Theresienstadt. We were safe. Time had run out for the Germans to blow up Theresienstadt which was their original plan. The miracle our mother had hoped and prayed for occurred.

VHCS Update 4



The "Schutzbrief" which Mrs. Sonnenschein carried in her shoe during the death-march from Dresden to Theresienstadt.

There was also an act of kindness or faith at this time. Before having been driven out of Dresden, the wife of the man in charge of the ammunition factory where we worked thrust into my hand a "Schutzbrief" — a letter that supposedly had the power to protect the person carrying it. I had helped her out occasionally and she had taken pity on me.

I carried the letter with me during

Reparations

New Developments

Germany and Austria have recently entered into negotiations with the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and the Committee for Jewish Claims on Austria. Questions, including claims against East Germany, should be directed to Mr. Saul Kaga, Executive Director, National Jewish Community Relations Council, 443 Park Avenue, New York, New York, 10016 (212) 684-6950. Soviet Jews who were incarcerated in any form and who did *not* serve in the Soviet armed forces may also apply.

A new amendment to the Austrian Social Insurance Law: 48 Novelle ASVG is as follows:

1. Victims of Nazi persecution from Austria who were born between March 12, 1924, and May 9, 1930, who were heretofore excluded from benefits, may now apply for pensions;
2. Current recipients of small pensions can apply for increases;
3. Claimants will have to document that they were resident in Austria on the day of the Anschluss, March 12, 1938.

For details contact Pensionsversicherungsanstalt der Angestellten, Friedrich Hillegeist Strasse 1, A-1021 Vienna, Austria.

For legal assistance, contact United Restitution Organization (URO), 570 Seventh Avenue, Room 302, New York, New York, 10016.

our death-march. I had it in my shoe and never let go of it. As a matter of fact, I still have the letter. I will always remember the woman who gave it to me.

I am happy to share these events with you. Both my mother and my sister have since died. My mother in 1975, my sister in 1986. But I firmly believe that their courage and strength helped me survive.

John Hirsch — A Personal Appreciation*

by Sybil Shack

There was urgency in the voice of the social worker on the telephone. Eight orphans of the Holocaust were arriving in Winnipeg in a few days. Could the Shacks take a child for a couple of weeks? My mother consulted my father and me, and we agreed that we would be happy to have a little girl until a home could be found for her. Only the "little girl" turned out to be two boys in their late teens, and the "couple of weeks" became a lifetime.

David Ehrlich was blonde, athletic, spoke several languages, and fitted easily into our household. John Hirsch was tall, thin, excitable, with black hair that sprang upward in wiry curls. He pranced around our small living room like a marionette, with arms and legs dangling from too short sleeves and trousers. He spoke only Hungarian, plus a smattering of German, and knew only the few disreputable English words picked up in a UNRRA Camp in Germany.

Within days of their arrival, Prof. Harry Stein, of the University of Manitoba, administered non-verbal intelligence tests and called to tell me the results. "David is very bright, outgoing, linguistically gifted," he said, "the more mature, I think ... but, Sybil, in John you have a genius on your hands."

And both, each in his own way, have proved how right he was in his assessment. David survived Auschwitz to raise a fine family. He has been successful in his business career, and a leader in his community. John is dead at 59, having made history in the world of theater.

The career of John Stephen Hirsch — on becoming a Canadian citizen he added the name of his deceased

little brother to his own — has been so thoroughly reported by the media that it would be redundant for me to review it.

So I write now, not of John Hirsch who called us, his Winnipeg family, every Sunday from wherever he happened to be, but of John Hirsch, who wasn't in Winnipeg to accept an honorary degree because he was in Halifax sharing his young cousin's Bar Mitzvah service; John Hirsch,



John Hirsch (l.) and David Ehrlich (r.) on Polson Avenue in Winnipeg, 1947.

who could give the same undivided attention to a five-year-old child as to its 90-year-old grandmother; John Hirsch, who enriched so many lives during his 42 years in Canada.

He was born in Siofok, Hungary, on May 1, 1930.

He grew up in a warm, nurturing, cultured environment, in a large extended family that was proud of being Jewish in a Catholic town. His father had been an officer in the Hungarian army, and marched in the veteran's parade every year. He simply could not believe that colleagues and neighbors would cooperate in destroying him and his family; and his wife and son died in a concentration camp. In grim irony, he was shot by the Nazis while on a forced march. John survived because he was in Budapest

with his grandfather when the Jews of Siofok were rounded up.

Two years after the war ended, John was in an orphanage near Paris, waiting to be sent to Palestine. Then the opportunity presented itself to go to Canada instead. He picked Winnipeg as his final destination because it was in the center of the country and seemed so safe.

Within weeks of his arrival in October, 1947, he had joined the Winnipeg Little Theater.

The rest is history. Almost from the day he arrived in Winnipeg he was involved in the theatre. He contributed to the initiation of every form of it in this city: puppets, children's theatre, amateur theatre, professional outdoor theatre, television production, and finally the Manitoba Theatre Centre, of which he was the artistic founding director. It became a model for regional theatre in Canada. Soon tempting offers began to arrive with challenges which he could no longer resist. In New York he worked at Lincoln Centre, on Broadway and off Broadway. His direction was critically acclaimed, and he received awards for it there and for his production of *The Dybbuk* in Los Angeles. (He had originally done *The Dybbuk* at the Manitoba Theatre Centre.) In Tel Aviv he directed *The Sea Gull*, in spite of the fact that his Hebrew consisted of the remnants of his Bar Mitzvah studies.

The Stratford Festival Theatre, like MTC, meant more to him than all the accolades he received in the United States.

He saw it as Canada's national theatre, with infinite possibilities, and so kept returning to it whenever he was invited. *cont'd on Page 6*

Director's Report

By Mrs. Ronnie Tessler

On March 1st, I took over from Barry Dunner as Executive Director of the Society as he was leaving for full time employment. But he hasn't left us completely, as he remained to help edit this newsletter and show me the ropes.

These first two months have been both stimulating and busy. As usual we have fielded requests, sent donation cards, done the banking, met with Rob and Robbie over business, conducted outreach programs, and assorted other things that make an office run. One of my greatest pleasures has been meeting all of you who have come by the office, worked on volunteer projects, or have come to board meetings.

John Hirsch

Cont'd from Page 5

Although he did so much of his work in the United States, he considered himself very Canadian, and was indeed described, at times perjoratively, as a Canadian nationalist. He might from time to time have been impatient with Canadian stodginess, but as a survivor of the Holocaust he felt that he owed a debt to the country that had adopted him. In paying that debt he was also doing penance for having survived; he had to achieve on behalf of those who did not live to use their talents.

John often said that his Jewishness had shaped his life and was reflected in his work. For him The Dybbuk was one of the most important things he had ever done. He described King Lear as being essentially Jewish, and the mystic elements in his production of The Tempest embodies elements of Jewish mysticism in which he was interested. Although a secular Jew (he had no affiliation with Jewish religious organizations), he loved the traditions and rituals of Judaism.

Family was paramount in his life, ranking with his work in importance. He needed the love and support of people around him, and had the capacity to make and hold life-long friends. The only aspect of his career that really bothered him was that it took him away from his home for so much of the time. He was devoted to his companion of 20 years or more. He dearly loved his cousins by birth and the Canadian family that he had made his own. He derived pleasure from his house in Toronto, from the cats which he would not give up in spite of his allergies, from the raccoons that brought their little ones to the kitchen door, from the lushness of the ravine which he looked out upon during his last days at home. Our house is full of him. His room is still "John's room". In the living room is the carved cabinet that had been a prop in his MTC production of Anastasia. He liked it so much he bought it and sent it home. On a wall hangs the birthday drawing he sent my mother on her 80th. I have a watercolour from a street bazaar in Bombay, a ring from Bangkok, a pin from Copenhagen, books he thought I should read. Not that we need these reminders of his love and caring. He was an extraordinary man, our friend, son and brother. We are privileged to have known him.

**Reprinted by permission from Jewish Outlook, November, 1989.*

At the same time, new concepts are being worked on and old ones refreshed. In the near future you can expect to receive the newsletter more frequently and see some interesting programming put in place. A generous grant is allowing us to hire a person to co-ordinate the audio-visual project, produce a catalogue for research purposes and buy professional equipment.

TRIBUTE EVENING

Our most immediate and exciting upcoming event is the Tribute Evening on May 24th.

A.G.M.

You can also put the annual General Meeting on your calendar for June 10, 7:30 pm, in the Zack Gallery at the JCC.

Continue to feel free to call, drop in, or otherwise contribute in your many generous ways to the work of the Society. Our number is 261-1180. If I am not in the office, or have just stepped out, the machine will take your message. The office is open most weekdays in the cubbyhole behind the Teen Lounge at the JCC.

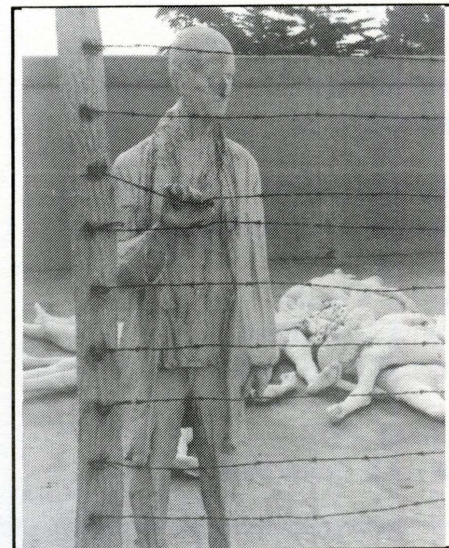
DONATIONS

September 1, 1989 — May 1, 1990

Gary & Diane Averbach
Sam & Fraidie Martz
Bernard & Vera Rozen
Frieda Ullman
Bill & Risa Levine
Leo Krell
Edith Lando
Sophie Waldman
Zoltan Rusnak
Emmy Krell
Jane Shadley
Ben & Rose Folk
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Harry & Elaine Lipetz
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Stanley & Odile Winfield
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Morris & Dena Wosk
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Janet Levy
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Giselle Warren
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Morley & Fay Shafran
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Ian & Roslyn Schwartz
Mel & Geri Davis
Morley & Myrna Koffman
David & Grace Ehrlich
Lionel Dolan
Robert & Marilyn Krell
Frances & William Switzer
George Shindler
Karl Taussig



Monument to Survivors by George Segal in the San Francisco Art Gallery Complex.

Tributes

IN MEMORY OF

SHELLY HALPENNY
Robert & Marilyn Krell

SYLVIA GELFER
David & Regina Feldman
Art & Terry Szajman

LIVIA SILLMANS
David & Lil Shafran

PAULINE SHACK
Marilyn & Marvin Lithwick
David & Grace Ehrlich

IZZY HOOPER
Harry & Rachel Wosk
David & Regina Feldman

NATHAN HAUPTMAN
David & Regina Feldman

HENRY WERTMAN
Harry & Rachel Wosk

BELLA BOGNER
Jack & Jenny Rootman

SID EIBSCHUTZ
Jaques Kneller

JOE SMAIL
Jaques Kneller

JOHN HIRSCH
Marilyn & Marvin Lithwick

KARL STEIN
Sam & Lola Haber
Leon & Evelyn Kahn

YIDAL FOX
David & Grace Ehrlich

IN HONOUR OF

JOSEPH & ROSE LEWIN'S
40TH WEDDING
ANNIVERSARY
Benjamin & Myra Goldstein
Irene Abramson

WILLIE AND TZESIA
BACHNER'S 50TH WEDDING
ANNIVERSARY
Sam & Else Dunner

CHAIM & SUSIE MICNER'S
35TH WEDDING
ANNIVERSARY
David & Regina Feldman

ROBERT KRELL
William & Frances Suitzer

ROBBIE WAISMAN
Cindy Dowsling

LEON KAHN'S 65TH
BIRTHDAY
Joseph & Rosalie Segal

GET WELL

STAN SUNSHINE
David & Regina Feldman

LEO LOWY
David & Grace Ehrlich

SARAH BIALOGLOWSKY
David & Regina Feldman
Leo Lowy
Art & Terry Szajman

MARVIN WEINTRAUB
Robert & Marilyn Krell

JOE WALL
Mark & Gerry London

TRIBUTE CARDS

Your generous contributions, through tribute cards for congratulatory and condolence purposes, help the Society to fulfill its mandate of Holocaust documentation, education and remembrance.

For cards, please contact Regina Feldman 327-3358, Grace Ehrlich 327-8064, or our office, 261-1180.

Remember, for there is, there must be, hope in remembering.

Elie Wiesel
