

The Holocaust Historiography Project

Remarkable Nonsense about the Holocaust

Prepared to Give Lessons on Holocaust

By ALLISON COHEN, Special to The Times
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Challenger Middle School teacher Bruce Galler of Palmdale once saved two students from expulsion from the Lancaster campus after they scratched swastikas onto test booklets.

Instead of expulsion, Galler "punished" the boys -- one Latino, the other Caucasian -- by sending them to an after-school screening of "Schindler's List."

The boys got the message, Galler said. "They just cried."

Galler, 35, expects to shed more light on the Holocaust for his students this fall as a result of a three-week summer tour of some of Europe's most infamous death camps where millions of Jews were killed by the Nazis.

"It was a surreal experience," Galler said this week. "I had an awakening of what really took place."

Galler was one of 43 secondary school teachers from across the country who participated in the 16th annual Summer Seminar on Holocaust and Jewish Resistance -- a teacher training program founded by Holocaust survivor Vladka Meed.

"A trip like this will make me more credible," said Galler, who teaches social science and English. "I thought I knew a whole bunch more than I did."

Galler visited death camps in Auschwitz/Birkinau, Majdanek and Treblinka, as well as sites of the Jewish resistance, such as the Warsaw Ghetto.

The goal of the program is to improve instruction relating to the Holocaust in U.S. public secondary schools. Teachers pay 40% of the cost to attend the tour -- for Galler, about \$2,000 -- and sponsoring groups and foundations pay the rest.

Already, Galler's students read the "Diary of Anne Frank" and then visit the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.

But now, having seen the fragments preserved from the Holocaust's atrocities, Galler can provide photographs and a firsthand account. Among the stacks of belongings he saw that were left behind by Jews before they were gassed or shot by the Nazis are such items as shoes, luggage and eyeglasses.

One experience that deeply affected Galler was seeing a huge mound of ashes preserved next to a crematory at Majdanek.

"My credibility increases," Galler said, "when I can say I've seen a crematorium ... and I've seen ashes as big as [our] school."

After the stops in Poland, the teachers studied at two Holocaust institutions in Jerusalem.

"I understand so much more now, and I'm anxious to pass the information on," Galler said. "But I don't think this is a history that anyone likes to teach."

Since 1985, 701 teachers have participated in the program. For an application for next year's tour, contact: American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, Attention: Vladka Meed, 122 W. 30th St., New York, NY 10001. Application deadline is April 15, 2001.

Send all questions and comments to webmaster@historiography-project.org.