

The Alumni Podium

Often hearing from graduates of the Holocaust/Genocide Project, we posted a letter and a short questionnaire to our discussion forum so that we could find out some specific information about where life has led former HGP members, what they're doing now, and how and if the HGP affected their life choices. The results, so far, are very interesting. Here is a sample of the questions and answers we received. Our goal is to keep everyone "in the link" through telecommunications. If you are a grad, and would like to reply, write to us!

Questions for Alumni: Please use these questions as a "guideline" to formulate your reply in a paragraph or two. Again, thanks for your help.

1. Name
2. Country
3. What are you doing now?
4. When did you participate in the HGP and what was your role in it? Did your participation in the HGP have an impact on your school experience?
5. Why did you join the HGP; was it what you thought it was going to be? (Explain briefly).
6. Did you take part in *An End to Intolerance* (magazine), the Spielberg Shoah interviews, or the Study Missions? How was that experience?
7. Have you taken part in workshops to explain the HGP? How were these experiences for you? for others?
8. Since the tragedy of 9/11, what new challenges are we facing that would be appropriate for the HGP to focus on?
9. One of the stated goals of the HGP is to educate ourselves and others in order to take an active role to make a more peaceful world. Did the HGP meet this goal for you? How?
10. Did the HGP have an impact on who you are today? Explain, please.
11. As an "Alumni", have you stayed "connected to the HGP in any way? How?
12. Are there any other related matters, stories or experiences that you would like to share with us on the HGP?

My name is **Tami Thompson Wood** and I am from the United States. I became involved in HGP when I was in high school (1993-1997) because I was interested in communicating with other teens from around the world and because I believed in the importance of studying the lessons of history, specifically of the Holocaust. My 9th grade English teacher, Mrs. Kern, encouraged all of her students to participate in HGP and *An End to Intolerance*. HGP allowed for an active and communal learning experience that I could not have gotten from a classroom only. Along with the magazine, *The Contemporary*, HGP truly broadened my horizons and made me more aware of, and sensitive to, the views of others. In addition, my experience with the Spielberg Shoah interviews made history come alive for me and brought home the importance of oral history as a tool for insuring collective memory (after 9/11 I volunteered with Columbia University's Oral History Project).

After graduating high school, I went on to major in history and English at Williams College and American Studies in graduate school at Columbia University. I am now coordinating and teaching an after-school program for high school students at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. On reflection, I believe that the most lasting impact my involvement in HGP has had on me and my career has been in shaping my belief in the importance of providing teens with learning opportunities outside of the classroom. Working as a museum educator for a year-long after-school program at the Whitney, it is my goal to bring in a diverse group of students from throughout New York City and to use the museum's collections to foster conversations

about issues, such as race, sexuality, and identity. I believe it is important for teenagers to have a safe forum to share their thoughts and opinions, to learn the thoughts and opinions of others, and to develop their critical thinking skills. I was fortunate to have this kind of forum through HGP and "The Contemporary" when I was in high school, and now I am fortunate enough to be in a position to create this kind of forum for other high school students.

For the suggestion box: In my post-high school studies of art and art history, I have learned that many twentieth century and contemporary artists have focused and are focusing their work on issues relevant to HGP. Like literature and film, which have been frequent topics of HGP discussion, art is a means for expressing society's values, fears, obsessions, and ideals. It might be interesting to expand HGP's interdisciplinary reach to include a look at how artists have dealt with the Holocaust, genocide, and issues of intolerance in the contemporary world.

My name is **Marian England** and I am from the United States. I am currently a first grade special education teacher in Boston, MA. I participated in the HGP in 1997 when I was a senior at Cold Spring Harbor High School. I was co-editor of *An End to Intolerance* (AETI) and became interested in it after taking Mrs. Kern's 10th grade Honors English course. We read Elie Wiesel's story of survival, and I also had the opportunity to visit the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. with Israeli students and some other CSH students on a weekend trip. I remember seeing a mountain of

hair that was shaved from the heads of those who stayed in the Holocaust camps. It was overwhelming. I also took part in the Spielberg Shoah interviews. It was so powerful to hear the stories of survivors and how remarkable their lives became because of their experiences. I felt relieved to know that their stories were now on tape so that their thoughts, feelings, and experiences could never be forgotten. I also remembered thinking how lucky and easy my own life was having never to experience anything even relatively close to what these people had gone through.

September 11th impacted my life like it did so many others. For hours I thought I had lost my brother that day. Fortunately I was very lucky in that he survived; however, many others were not. I think that for many, 9/11 made Americans feel that they were no longer safe in their own country. I, like many others, had never felt that anxiety or fear before. Other people, like those who live in Israel and Palestine, must live in that fear everyday. I think the goal for the HGP is to continue educating people and to continue to tell the stories of survivors and their families. As long as people continue to hear stories of the world and war, people will have to listen, think, and ultimately do. I applaud HGP for their continued hard work and their everlasting will to make the world a better, safer, and more educated place.

My name is **Udara Soysa**, and I am from Sri Lanka where I am studying and working in i*EARN-Sri Lanka, helping out with the national events and doing the web site for many other projects including CIVICS and Child Labour.

Participating in HGP made my eyes open to the suffering of innocent Jewish people during the Holocaust, due to the fact that we here in south Asia are not properly educated by our school curriculum.

I joined the HGP mainly after reading about the Holocaust; I wanted to get in and get to know what I don't know and to share what I know. One of the milestones of my life was to be working as an international editor for AETI. When I was asked me to be so, I was overjoyed. I still feel my contributions were inadequate, so this year, too, I want to do my best as an international editor so I can do what I could not finish two years back.

In Russia, I met lots of wonderful friends from Israel, extremely friendly, and we had a lovely time sharing and even speaking about the Holocaust and related topics. And, in Sri Lankan workshops, the HGP was introduced. The HGP's aim is to spread love and understanding, and I feel that what guns can't do, pens can do. So it would be great if we can concentrate on topics such as concept of equality and non-violence methods of solving

conflicts.

Working as an international editor gave me the mental boost to work better in local magazines as well as some other international magazines. That was a huge impact for my career, I believe. I have stayed connected to the HGP mostly with the forums and indeed it's wonderful! Frankly speaking, I already posted some about the genocide in Sri Lanka back in 1989 and would continue to do so; we should not let the voices of death be unheard!

My name is **Alison Stern Golub**, and I participated in the i*EARN Holocaust Study Mission to Poland and Israel in March and April of 1994. I was one of only six American students on

the trip – the only one from the West Coast – and it was a very unique experience for me. I was born and grew up in Seattle, Washington, and I attended Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island from 1996 to 2000. I am currently living in Israel.

My participation in the HGP had a tremendous impact on my life, my interests, and my professional goals. I had always been interested in the Holocaust, but my trip to Poland solidified my desire to study it more intensely. When I began my studies at Brown, my first goal was to take classes with Elie Wiesel, the author of *Night* and perhaps one of the most prominent Holocaust survivors in the world, who teaches at Boston University. I spent three semesters commuting back and forth to Boston, attending three different classes with him.

Throughout my college career, I was voracious for information about the Holocaust, historical Jewish persecution, and genocide in general. I majored in psychology, but then decided that that was not enough to truly capture my real interests. So I created another, independent major, and I called it, "Human Resilience Studies." I envisioned it as an interdisciplinary look at the extraordinary strength of the human psyche and spirit as a universal phenomenon. Resilience is not limited to Holocaust survivors, or rape victims, or abused children. Trauma is, unfortunately, widespread and pervasive. Thus, resilience can arise in nearly any situation, as can the lack thereof. I took classes in psychology, sociology, anthropology, religious studies, and literature, in order to bring the array of perspectives together into a cohesive look at human strength.

I also created an independent study course at Brown (which ultimately became a real course) on comparative genocide, also, in part, connected with my experiences on the HGP trip. We looked at a number of prominent historical genocides and attempted to define what makes a genocide and what societal





and political factors must fall into place in order for one to occur. Finally, in my senior year, I wrote my honors thesis, titling it, “Understanding Resilience Through Their Eyes and Words: The Varied Memories and Narratives of Individuals Who Survived the Holocaust.” I spent over eighty hours interviewing twenty survivors of the Holocaust, asking them about their lives before, during, and after the Holocaust. I asked them what their conceptualization of resilience was, and whether they believed they fit that definition. We talked about religion, and survival, and important life events. What I found was that these people have incorporated the Holocaust into their most basic identities. They are survivors first, and humans second. They are asked to speak as survivors, and asked to tell only the portions of their life stories that intersect with the Holocaust. In fact, when I repeatedly asked my subjects to tell me about the rest of their lives, I was continually met with, “Oh, you don’t want to hear about that...let me tell you more about Auschwitz!”

And as I tried to convince my twenty subjects that I was interested in more than just their identities as Holocaust survivors, I realized that there was no reason for them to believe me. For over fifty years, the world has been convincing these survivors that their worth to us lies only in their Holocaust experiences. But I proposed another perspective. Holocaust survivors are valuable to the world because they have lived, not because they almost died. We ought not to be asking them how they experienced the trauma itself, but how they have managed to piece together a life after the trauma they experienced. The greatest lesson that Holocaust

survivors hold lies in their collective ability to flourish after tremendous adversity. It is this ability, this exceptional resilience, that our global community should be asking about, and not simply the horrors that created the need for resilient survival. Of course, I could go on and on, but this was the basic gist of my thesis.

I came to live in Jerusalem just over seven weeks ago, and became a citizen of Israel three weeks ago. My plan is to get my Ph.D. in clinical psychology, either at Hebrew University, here in Jerusalem, or Ben Gurion University, in Beersheva. I have made contacts with professors at most of the universities here, and there are many people doing research similar to what I have done. In fact, I will begin work in the next couple of months on a psychological study of ZAKA (Hebrew acronym for “Identification of Catastrophe Victims”), an organization of approximately 800 ultra-Orthodox Jewish men who go to scenes of bombings in order to recover the remains of the victims. They do this work under the commandment that bodies should be buried whole. The hypothesis I will be working with is that these men, because they are so committed to their work, religiously, spiritually, and morally, will suffer less symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The primary project investigator and I believe that they are, in fact, more resilient than the average Israeli (and certainly more than the average American). In all honesty, I am here in Israel, and I have chosen to live here permanently, because I do believe strongly that Israeli society, collectively, is more resilient than most. I hope to prove that at some point in my psychological career.

So that’s the basic news on me. I have written a number of articles for *An End to Intolerance*, and I have enjoyed receiving the yearly copies of it. I think this program is an amazing one, and what the students at Cold Spring Harbor High School (led by their project coordinator, Honey Kern) have accomplished over the years is admirable. I have kept in close touch with Honey and with Gideon Goldstein, who I could only describe as my second father and one of my closest friends here in Israel. I am forever grateful to both of them and to the HGP for allowing me to participate in the Study Mission way back in 1994. Now, almost ten years later, it is clear to look back and see that it made an indelible mark on me and my life. I honestly don’t know where I’d be right now without it.

My name is **Joey Bergida**. Having been involved with the HGP/AETI from 1992-1996, I was fortunate enough to have journeyed to Poland and Israel as part of the first Study Mission in 1993. I participated in the SHOAH Foundation’s project, engaged in phenomenal dialogue with the international community via i*EARN, and participated in numerous other activities. As an undergraduate at Boston College, my interest in the Holocaust and more recent genocides continued to develop, and one of my thesis papers dealt with the Holocaust and its impact on the past, present, and future. Still today I find that the knowledge I gained, and the discussions I had, continue to define who I am and how I view world issues and events. (Interestingly, even as a graduate student I find myself working with under-grads studying Hitler and the Holocaust!)

I am glad that the HGP/AETI has seen continued growth

over the years, and I strongly believe that discussion concerning the various genocides within the global community, and unrest and overall rights of humanity, must continue to be explored through open dialogue. It is this dialogue that will end the intolerance still around us today. One issue that I hope AETI will explore, in some fashion, is the current unrest in the United States, and, to some degree, the world community, regarding Gay Rights and Gay Marriage. In my opinion, this issue strikes at the very core of civil rights and is one that needs immediate attention and discussion. I wish everyone involved with HGP/AETI continued success.

I am **Sarah Marx** and I am a Junior Policy Analysis and Management major at Cornell University. I was part of the Holocaust Genocide Project while I was at Cold Spring Harbor High School. I joined HGP through sheer interest in the subject matter. I really feel I gained the knowledge and experience in terms of the importance in understanding other people. I helped contribute to *An End to Intolerance* through contributing pictures of the concentration camps I visited and writing articles on the Internet about Neo-Nazis. I went into health classes at CSH to talk about the project and its subject matter. It was an enlightening and rewarding experience. It is important for students to realize what is going on out there.

Since the tragedy of September 11th, we live in a different world. This is why the HGP project is so vital to young people. This project has the ability to revamp itself to further enhance its core mission. There should be a focus on basic rights, such as civil liberties, especially for Muslim people, who under the Patriot Act, are having their rights infringed upon. Globally as well, there is much fighting in the Middle East over ancient disputed territory, such as in Israel.

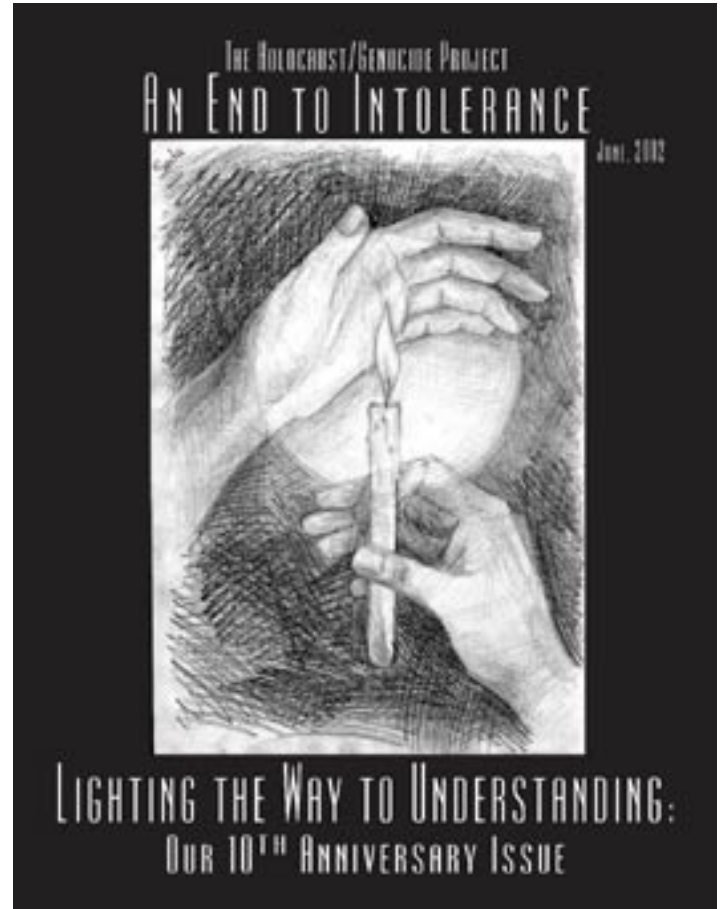
One of HGP's goals is to educate people towards a more peaceful world. This project has helped me see how other people view the world. Once you can understand this, then it is a lot easier to take steps in the direction of peaceful relations. It helped to first open my eyes to what was going on in the world outside of Cold Spring Harbor. Through experiences such as travelling to Eastern Europe through the project, as well as the "Adopt a Survivor" program, I really began to see what it must have been like to undergo such a life experience. My perception was further enhanced through travelling to Eastern Europe to see the concentration camps of the Holocaust.

One way the project can be enhanced is through creating more of an alumni connection to spread the project's goals and mission to more people throughout the world. I regret not have not stayed as connected to the project as I would like. I have spoken with Mrs. Kern a few times since leaving high school, and have seen the newer editions of the magazine! It is hard to stay connected when you are away in college. College students should have more of a connection to the project through University Student Organizations.

My name is **Aaron O'Shannessy**. I am from Australia, and I work for the Asia Education Foundation at the University of Melbourne in Australia, coordinating teacher exchanges to and from Asia.

I first participated in the HGP in 1992 when the Internet and working via it was something that was very unusual and out there. I started off as a student who was interested in the HGP and went on to participate in the 1995 Study Tour to Poland and Israel. I later became one of the international editors to AETI. The HGP had a HUGE experience on my school experience and who I am today. I would not be in this job actually!

To be honest, I actually didn't join the HGP straight away. Some of my friends were working on fundraising for their trip to Poland/Israel, and I said that I would help them out, but then, I really became involved and realised it was a lot more than I first thought.



I was international editor for AETI for a couple of years and have written some articles for it since then. I also participated in the 1995 Study Mission. Both experiences were fantastic - interacting with students on opposite sides of the globe. For someone who grew up in a country town in Australia-- it was a pretty big life changing experience.

I helped present at the HGP workshop at the i*EARN conference in Chattanooga TN in 1998. I also gave a presentation at the i*EARN conference in Melbourne in 1995. Both experiences were very positive and everyone really wanted to hear what I had to say. However, I hate public speaking and it was very scary!!

Since the tragedy of 9/11, I think something we all need to focus on is tolerance. It seems many people are becoming swept up in this "new" world of "apparent" terror and treachery. Education is the key, and I think the HGP will have a big place in helping

educate others. I think to be aware of an issue and understand the consequences that can occur from it plays a huge role. The Holocaust is one example of many where we must know of past actions, their consequences and how to prevent them. I think that what is happening now in the world could be something that we all need to working against preventing. I think the HGP met this goal for me. It is hard to put into words. If you were to ask any of my teachers at the time, even Honey Kern, I am sure they could agree. I think I see things differently. I am more compassionate, understanding, tolerant and passionate. I see so much hope in people and want to work at keeping it - not destroying it.

I haven't had much to do with the HGP for a good two years now (since I started work). I did write a couple of articles in 2001, one of which was published in the last AETI. Prior to this I was always doing bits and pieces with the HGP. I will always be part of the HGP and will continue to be involved, even as intermittent it may be. I think that Honey Kern deserves a big round of applause from everyone here for her commitment, enthusiasm, and passion. She has taught me a lot, and I only wish that I can grow up to have qualities like hers.

I am **Matt London** and currently a senior at the University of Pennsylvania, and in May 2004 I will graduate with a degree in International Relations. My interest in international affairs and American foreign policy first began in high school and as a member of the Holocaust Genocide Project.

The objective of the project's magazine is to contribute in small part to the creation of a more peaceful world, and I believe the mission of the HGP is more important now than ever. Increasingly, American intervention internationally has been justified by the desire to combat genocide and human rights abuses. These are the very issues confronted by contributors to the *An End To Intolerance* magazine, as it strives to root out examples of intolerance past and present that have gone without notice.

As a former editor of the magazine, I had always perceived this to be a prominent objective. Another intention of the magazine is to connect with individuals of other countries and cultures and to learn from one another. The message of the HGP is complex in its scope, but simple in its base intentions. Educate people on the wrongs of the world, and understand those situations within the specific context of their cultures.

I believe an important issue for the HGP to confront today is the lack of accurate perceptions of the Western World held by those of the Middle East, and the equally inaccurate perception

of Middle Easterners and the role of Islam, by the Western World.

Even though the Holocaust Genocide Project was founded in remembrance of the Holocaust, its contents have never been limited to those issues concerning Jews and tragedies of the past. I always understood the HGP to work in the present, learn from the past, and do a small part in building a more peaceful world by getting kids interested in the affairs of the world.

I'm **Christine Koprash** from the United States. I am now a junior at Dartmouth College, just got back from a term abroad in Ireland, and am interning in a literary agency in New York City. I participated in HGP through high school, went on the trip to Berlin, Warsaw, Krakow, and Prague when I was in tenth grade, and interviewed survivor David Gewirtzman.

I met some of my best friends on that trip, and its impact still resonates in my life. Auschwitz, in person, brought home everything I'd ever read and heard about the Holocaust. Although we saw much evidence of human atrocities, we also heard about many instances of kindness and compassion that touched us deeply. It was a trip that showed the best and worst in humanity, teaching us all what hate can do.

However, David may have left an even stronger impression on me. Meeting and talking to him put a face on the horror that was almost too big to contemplate. I wish now that I'd taken better notes on the details of David's life, but we were drawn into David's story so completely that we thought and talked about him all week until he came again and we could hear the next chapter in his life. He and his family went through unimaginable suffering, but David came out of his

experiences a person who forgave and loved, eventually even donating his money and time to an orphanage of Nazis' children during his career in the US military.

Today, I think the challenges of hate and fear are no less a part of our lives than they were fifty years ago. HGP prepared me to be vigilant, and although when I joined HGP I thought we should merely try not to forget so similar tragedies could not occur, I now know that they are occurring every day. I think we should fear the Patriot Act, and look closely at our government's policy of detaining people without charging them with crimes. I believe we need to think less along the lines of an "Axis of Evil," and consider ourselves part of a global community made up of mostly good human beings, and direct our efforts toward educating others about hate, fear, and violence. HGP helped me learn about the good communication can do, and how watchful we all must be about intolerance.

THE HOLOCAUST/GENOCIDE PROJECT
AN END TO INTOLERANCE
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REACHING OUT TO ONE ANOTHER