

JSU hears a survivor's tale

*For the dead and the living
we must bear witness.*

— U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council

By Brian Lazenby

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The years of the Third Reich are etched deeply in his mind. If he were to forget, the "106377" tattooed on his arm reminds him.

Jack Bass of Adamsville, a Holocaust survivor, presented the keynote address at Days of Remembrance 2000, the 20th annual Holocaust Commemoration presented Thursday night by the Student Government Association of Jacksonville State University and the JSU Holocaust Committee.

There was standing room only on the 11th floor of JSU's Houston Cole Library. Hundreds turned out to remember the millions that perished, as well as those who survived, during Hitler's reign in Nazi Germany.

Bass, in his mid-70s, remembers anti-Semitism in Germany long before Adolf Hitler's rise to power.

Even in preschool, he remembers being called a "dirty Jew." He recalls being forced to study German poetry which reeked of anti-Semitic ideas.

Bass said Jews were persecuted from the moment Hitler came to power.

There was a boycott of Jewish businesses, Bass said. Jewish art was banished from society, and Jewish musicians were silenced.

Bass was 19 in 1942, when he and his family were rounded up and packed like sardines on trains that would take them to the concentration camps.

For two and a half years, Bass spent time in Auschwitz,

Dachau and several other German concentration camps.

Once he arrived at Auschwitz, prisoners were divided into two lines. One line was mostly made up of the elderly and sick. They were herded off by the Schutzstaffel (SS) to the gas chambers.

Bass, because he was young and strong, was in the second group. Its members were forced as slave labor to build factories for the German army.

After working all day, Bass said, his hair would be white from the ashes from the crematorium, that constantly fell through the air like snow.

Prisoners were beaten regularly, Bass said. They were fed a watery soup made of rotten vegetables. They were also given bread, which was not really bread at all. It was a compressed mixture of oats and sawdust, he said.

The prisoners battled typhus, dysentery, fleas and lice. Because the water was red and contaminated, with what some said was blood, Bass said, he held hot peppers in his mouth to make himself salivate. This is what he drank.

Bass told the listeners it's a wonder anyone survived at all.

Freed at the end of the war, Bass came to America in 1948 and lived in New York and New Jersey. He moved to Alabama five years ago.

At the time Bass came to America, he said, he could not have lived in the South. The Jim Crow laws were constant reminders of the persecution he had received in Germany.

During such a horrendous experience, many people would cling to their faith, but Bass apologized and said his grasp on God weakened.

Bass said he couldn't understand how "so many pious Jews died and I was there, not a strong believer, and I survived."

JSU English Professor Dr. Steve Whitton, who was in the audience during Bass' presentation commented afterward that the fact the Holocaust occurred did not affect his own faith directly, but "it teaches us the need to be humane



Trent Penny/The Anniston Star

Jack Bass, a Holocaust survivor, speaks at Jacksonville State University Thursday night.

to one another."

The commemoration also included music and presentation of winners of middle and high school writing competitions on the topic, "Imagining the Holocaust," as well as an invocation and candle lighting ceremony. The event closed with recitation of The Kaddish by members of Temple Beth-El in Anniston. The Kaddish, traditionally recited by mourners at public services after the death of close relatives, was offered in remembrance of the millions exterminated in the Holocaust.