

FORWARDING THE MESSAGE OF THE HOLOCAUST

By Erin Chupp
The Chanticleer Photo Editor

Can you imagine being woken up at 4 a.m. by the sound of a beating drum, and when you stumble out of bed, squinting your eyes, you go to the door and hear the worst news of your life?

"They told us to be ready within one hour, and to assemble right in front of our houses, and we could only take whatever we could carry ourselves," Max Steinmetz said. Steinmetz, who was forced to leave his Transylvanian home, is a survivor of the Holocaust.

He spoke to a crowd of over 400 people Thursday evening in the Ernest Stone Theater, many of them high school students.

Every detail was real to those in attendance, but one could not put himself in the shoes of 79-year old Steinmetz. Inside each head, imaginations were running, trying to imagine how you would feel if you were in a labor camp at the age of 13.

A few of the students tried to capture their feelings on paper, when the winners of the "Imagining the Holocaust" writing competition read their works aloud.



The Chanticleer/Katja Sunnarborg

Max Steinmetz at the far left taking part on Kaddish, which is a prayer recited after the death of close relatives, with some of the members of Temple Beth-AI in Anniston. Steinmetz spoke to over 400 people last Thursday in the Ernest Stone Theatre, many of them high school students.

Amelia Bass from Coleman Middle School said her teacher assigned the topic as a paper and that she really got into it. "I thought it was a horrible, horrible act," Bass said about the Holocaust.

Speaking into the microphone slow and with poise, Bass could probably relate better than others because she is about the same age as Steinmetz when he was sent to the concentration camp.

Steinmetz was forced to walk to a railroad station with many other Jews. They were met by German SS and a freight train that would soon become their living quarters for the next three days, with only one bucket of

water and a slice of bread.

"There was not enough room for everybody to sit down or to stand up," Steinmetz said.

When they opened the train doors he was in Auschwitz, one of the most infamous concentration camps. Steinmetz remembers being shoved off the train and being put into lines. Dr. Josef Mendal, "the angel of death," stood in front of them.

With the point of his stick, Mendal selected the Jews to either move to the right or to the left. At this point they did not know the meaning of the two groups, or even why they were there.

Steinmetz vividly recalls the two-piece suit the Germans gave him after his shower, white and blue stripes with a yellow star of David on his left chest and his back. "My name died at that moment," he said, "I was referred to as 7241."

Later that night, still very confused, Steinmetz finally had the opportunity to ask another prisoner some questions. He asked him what the foul stench in the air was, and the man asked him where the rest of his family was.

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After Steinmetz told the man that he and his brother were pointed right, but his parents were pointed to the left, the Hungarian prisoner said, "That's what you're smelling, they're burning your parents."

"He has the effect of bringing it alive for me," said Dr. Russel Lemmons. Lemmons is a JSU professor and a German historian. His 5-year old daughter, Lauren, lit six candles at the beginning of the service, one for each million who died senselessly during the Holocaust.

Mr. Steinmetz carried himself confidently on stage. His voice only slowed and quivered once when he spoke of his first return trip to the camps just three years ago. Otherwise, his meter continued along as if the audience was riding on a train that very night with him.

"It's not as easy as it appears," Steinmetz said afterwards. He said his children encourage him to keep telling his story and that it's easier to

speak when he feels there is a receptive audience. He felt like he could have told stories for hours, but time ran out on the evening.

Since its founding 22 years ago, Dr. Steve Whitton has played a major role in the Holocaust Remembrance committee. Dr. Whitton is an English professor at JSU. Not only did the evening activities speak to him spiritually, but also he said he was affected deeply during Mr. Steinmetz's talk.

Whitton pulled up some carpet at the end of the third row in the theater. He said he was affected when he turned around and saw the number of people there and the attentive looks on their faces. With that he felt wonderful, like the message was reaching people, especially students.

"It's very important for me to see so many people here because it's our responsibility, those of us who are still alive, to spread this message," Steinmetz said.