Campus remembers the Holocaust

By Irina Antonyan
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"I am a lucky guy."
Those are the words of Alfred Caro of Anniston, who was arrested in Berlin during the first wave of Nazi repressions in 1937 but released from a prison camp only eight weeks later.

When Caro came to the United States in 1953, he settled in Anniston and opened a restaurant, bringing with him a strange and unfamiliar word — Holocaust.
The word itself still triggers painful memories for many people who assembled at Jacksonville's State University's Stone Center Theatre Tuesday night.

To help a new generation understand that word, the Student Government Association, the Center for Southern Studies and the JSU Holocaust Committee decided seven years ago to bring "Days of Remembrance" to campus.

They started with 35-40 students and three or four faculty members. Last year 200 people came. This year, some 100 people.

"It's a busy week," said Teresa Suco, a member of the University Holocaust Commemoration Committee and the Foreign Languages Department. "A week before finals."

But the commemoration will continue.

"A number of students have never heard of the Holocaust," said JSU student Garry Grizzard, 38, who came to the Holocaust commemoration with his 9-year-old son Martin. "Martin wanted to come. I like for him to realize that the Holocaust was real."

Its reality was hardly doubted by any of those who read their compositions, performed music or lit candles in front of the silent house yesterday. Those who best understood were the four Holocaust survivors who read the Kaddish, a prayer traditionally recited by mourners after the death of close relatives.

The Kaddish was read for the more than six million Jews killed in Europe by the Nazis.

"I escaped the day they wanted me to go on a transport to labor camps and then to Auschwitz..." remembered Walter Israel of Anniston. His sister spent five years in concentration camps, and when she was going to America she saw her ex-camp guards on the same boat.

"A kid in the Nazi uniform had come up to me and spit in my face," said another survivor, Ernest Kohn of Oxford. Jews had no rights in Nazi Germany, and when one of his friends tried to defend himself, he was killed by the police.

In his comments during the invocation, Dr. Daniel Specator of Anniston's Temple Beth-El said that remembering the atrocities is necessary because "we must make certain that our faces are not the faces of spectators."

The danger of indifference was clearly realized by all the speakers. "Because people turned their backs, the Holocaust occurred," said Sam Witherspoon, president of the JSU Student Government Association, in the opening speech.

Another danger identified at the commemoration was that of historical revisionism.

Said Rabbi Fred Raskind of Beth-El: "It is the systematic movement to undermine the realities of the Holocaust horrors by simply revising, or reinventing modern history. These 'scholars' use the very freedom in order to publish their lies. And so they propogate a political position that the Holocaust never really happened, that six million Jews and millions of others - Slavs, Poles, gypsies - were never really exterminated, that the whole Holocaust was created to gain sympathy for world Jewry and Israel."

Two years ago, Kohn was invited to a reunion of a Frankfurt Jewish school. The organizers found only 350 of the 4,000 graduates. For him, the Holocaust is very real.

It is important to remember the Holocaust so that we can avoid the mistakes of the past and apply the lesson that we've learned in Europe to our political situation right now in America," he said.

The economic downturn, he explained, increases distrust of outsiders and leads to things like renewed racism, Japan-bashing and skinheads.

Kohn is grateful to America. "It's the best country," he said. "People, they take it for granted. I tell everybody to vote. I don't care who you vote for."

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