

ALIVE



Holocaust survivors Brenda and Moritz Perelman chat with Henry Salmon, center, whose late father, Egon, also was a survivor. (STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE/KATHRYN CARSE)

Borough's Holocaust survivors are focus of Wagner exhibit

Show captures the human element of monstrosity

By Kathryn Carse

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The subject matter was painful but the gathering in a corner of Horrmann Library's Spotlight Gallery was a lively one. On view is "Tragedy and Resilience: Holocaust Survivors of Staten Island."

Students, survivors and their families mixed with community members to see very personal photographs, part of an inaugural exhibit of Wagner College's Holocaust Education and Programming Center.

The idea began about five years ago when Lori Weintrob, professor of history, heard Egon Salmon's story about his family's separation and his escape from Germany as a teen that eventually landed him on Staten Island where he began a successful real estate business.

"I began to wonder if there were so many important stories among the Staten Island community why weren't they more visible and what could be done to give visibility to the Jewish community and the Holocaust survivors," said Ms. Weintrob.

With the backing of the college's Chai Society, she began collecting stories and immersing students in the history, including trips to Holocaust memorial sites in Europe.

"This is part of an ambitious project to research as many survivors as possible on Staten Island," she told the group. The exhibit represents the first 16.

Hailing from Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, their families endured countless hardships in ghettos, in hiding, in labor and death camps and extermination sites.

For this exhibit, she and photographer Sara Signorelli traveled around Staten Island to shoot portraits of those who are living among the first 16.

"It is really inspiring to



This portrait of Rachel Roth, who smuggled guns in the Warsaw Ghetto and survived Majdanek and Auschwitz, is featured at the exhibit. (PORTRAIT BY SARA SIGNORELLI)

'TRAGEDY & RESILIENCE'

Time: Daily, 9 a.m.-8 p.m., through April 28

Where: Horrmann Library Spotlight Gallery, Wagner College

Admission: Free

Tomorrow: Hear Rabbi A. Romi Cohn, author of "The Youngest Partisan: A Young Boy Fights the Nazis," speak about his resistance in Slovakia. At 6 p.m., Lori Weintrob will give an overview of exhibit. A light kosher dinner and candlelighting will be served at 6:30 p.m. in the Manzulli Boardroom, Foundation Hall. Cohn takes the mic at 7 p.m.

meet people who have gone through such tragedy and shown such courage and to meet them now when it's so far in their past and they are full of life," said Ms. Signorelli.

"You look at Rachel Roth, you see the sparkle in her eye, then you see the tattoo on her arm; it's shown without sadness or defeat," she added.

Moritz Perelman and his wife, Brenda, were among the survivors attending the reception whose portraits hung in the exhibit. The significance is double-edged, said

Perelman.

"On the one hand, we have to remember. On the other, I'm glad I am in the exhibit and not in the cemetery," he said, getting an appreciative laugh from his wife.

Rachel Borenstein, whose father Emil Jacoby died in 1998, said she always knew her father was in Auschwitz, but it wasn't until he turned 60 that he opened up. He had always been an artist, but then he poured his experiences under the Nazis into his art and poetry. A number of stark black-and-white illustrations are on view.

"He kept it all inside; there is a lot of emotional and physical pain with the memories. But you reach a certain age and realize life is not forever, you want to leave a legacy."

Curated by Ms. Weintrob and art student Lauren Citarella, the exhibit includes photos of artifacts from the survivors and the Museum of Jewish Heritage and original drawings by Emil Jacoby. In addition to Ms. Signorelli, Rita Reynolds and Leslie Lopez contributed photographs.

Among the survivors highlighted are Chaim Ben-Aron, Romi Cohn, Rachel Gottlieb, Gabi Held, Dora Luba Malz, Brenda and Moritz Perelman, Rachel Roth, Egon Salmon, Arthur Speilman, Benjamin Wayne and others.

Weintrob knows there must be at least 100 Staten Island survivors. Through the videos acquired through the Shoah Project, she already knows of 40 of them. A total of 500 students, high school and middle school in addition to her college classes, have begun research papers to tell their stories.

Anyone who is survivor or with knowledge of a survivor should contact Weintrob at 718-390-3309 or LRWeintr@wagner.edu.

"The goal with community support is to build a Holocaust Center that tells the stories of our survivors that captures their courage, resiliency and struggles against prejudice and anti-semitism to inspire the next generation of young people," said Ms. Weintrob.