

Alive



John Pregulman photographs Holocaust survivor Hannah Steiner. Photos by Shira Stoll, for Staten Island Advance

'It's very important for them to be remembered'

Couple on a mission to photograph living Holocaust survivors

Shira Stoll stoll@siadvance.com

With a yellow brick wall background and tall windows, John and Amy Pregulman, a Denver- and Memphis-based couple on a mission to photograph every Holocaust survivor, photographed four of them recently at the Wagner College Holocaust center.

"I think having Staten Island and Wagner College Holocaust Center represented in a national project like this is incredibly meaningful for our community," said Lori Weintrob, the director of the Wagner College Holocaust Center. Wagner College partnered with the Advance to bring the couple to Staten Island.

Holocaust survivors Arthur Spielman, Egon Salmon, Hannah Steiner and Shirley Gottesman were in attendance.

The photography project began in 2014 when John Pregulman was invited to photograph Holocaust survivors at a museum in Skokie, Illinois. He said he photographed 65 survivors in three days.

"I really became enamored with these amazing people," he said. "It's very important for them to be remembered and have their stories remembered."

His moving experience in Illinois turned into five years of traveling across the country, meeting hundreds of survivors. It even led him to Memphis, where he met his wife, Amy Pregulman.

The pair began traveling together and have now visited 40 U.S. cities, as well as Krakow, Prague and Tokyo to photograph 896 survivors. After this visit to New York, Houston and Israel are next on the list.

But, while photographing in Orlando, John Pregulman was disturbed to find out that a 94-year-old survivor had no food in her fridge and had to spend her grocery money to repair her air conditioner. He soon discovered that 30% to 35% of Holocaust survivors in the United States are living in poverty.

"So, we decided ... that we just had to do something," he said.

KAVOD's mission is to provide "emergency aid to Holocaust Survivors in need," according to its website, kavodensuringdignity.com/. John Pregulman said they've given aid in 37 cities to more than 1,200 survivors.

The organization has raised over

\$320,000 in about three years for aid to Holocaust survivors. The money was raised by individual donations through Facebook crowd-funding, phone calls, speaking at events and news spread through the media, the couple said.

All aid is given through Jewish Family Services, Self Help or other organizations that work with survivors on the ground. The survivors receive all of the funds through gift cards. "One-hundred percent of all these donations goes directly to the survivor," John Pregulman said.

In addition to helping survivors in need, KAVOD also is devoted to educating people about the Holocaust, and the photography project became an education resource.

"[The] photographs led to us knowing the issue, which led to us forming KAVOD and then it circled back around to having the photos help us teach the stories and be witnesses to the stories," Amy Pregulman explained.

The photographs are displayed on the KAVOD website and are exhibited in Holocaust museums around the world, including an upcoming exhibit at the Los Angeles for Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day).

"We don't have grandparents," John said, who writes handwritten notes to each survivor after he photographs them. "So we stay in touch."

In addition to the photo shoot, Wagner College sophomore Bethany Friedman organized students to sing for the survivors as a part of a program, Shir Levav (Sing with Heart), which brings students and Holocaust survivors together through singing, dancing, food and art. The goal is to have students perform for the survivors to brighten their day. Alexandra Rose DeAngelis, Olivia Esteban, Andrew Kolar and Colleen Kelly performed at the event.

"I think by having the students singing with them and bonding with them it was so special," Weintrob said. "We had both the survivors and next generation together witnessing the KAVOD photography project."

"Our time is short," Amy Pregulman said. "We're running out of time. We need to do something now. We're responsible for [the survivors]."



Back row from left to right: Sydelle Spielman, Bethany Friedman, Andrew Kolar, Lori Weintrob, Colleen Kelly, Alexandra Rose DeAngelis, Olivia Esteban, Amy Pregulman, and John Pregulman. Front row: Holocaust survivors Arthur Spielman, Shirley Gottesman, Egon Salmon and Hannah Steiner.



John and Amy Pregulman photograph Holocaust survivor Shirley Gottesman at Wagner College. The couple has visited 40 U.S. cities, as well as Krakow, Prague and Tokyo to photograph 896 survivors.

About this story

Two-time New York Emmy nominee Shira Stoll, a multimedia specialist for the Advance/SILive.com, is the filmmaker behind the "Where Life Leads You" documentary and the Staten Island Holocaust Survivors series. She has completed 15 interviews, including with Arthur Spielman, Egon Salmon, Hannah Steiner and Shirley Gottesman — all of whom were at the KAVOD event. To see Stoll's portraits of them, and to watch their stories, go to holocaust.silive.com.