Students carry the words of Holocaust survivors through performance

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"It's a story that has to be told." Those words, spoken by Holocaust survi- vor Egon Salmon, echo through the voices of students who bring the powerful message of "never forget" to life.

At Wagner College, Lori Weintraub, history professor and director of the Wagner College Holocaust Center, partnered with theater professor and actor Theresa McCarthy to create a class that connected the stories of Holocaust survivors.

The class, known as Learning/Community One (LCO), urges students to think differently about the Holocaust by employing memoir- rizing survivor testimonies and performing these testimonies in a play.

WHY NOW?
In a 2008 study, Schorr Consulting, com- missioned by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference), discovered that 46% of adults did not know one fact about the Holocaust.

The study also found that 80% of Amer- icans have not visited a Holocaust museum and 66% do not know the meaning of Holocaust survivor. It also found that as many as 66% of millennials did not know what Auschwitz was.

The astonishing numbers suggest that younger generations, specifically millennials, are less familiar with the Holocau- st.

This class challenges students to defy these statistics and pass the survivor stories to the next generation.

From 2017 to 2019, Advance multime- dia production specialist Alanna Stoll followed a group of Wagner College students taking the class that this summer was turned into a musical performance with the aim of teaching the survivors in class, memorizing their stories and performing their stories in front of an audi- ence.

HOW IT BEGAN
The idea for the class began in 2018 when Weintraub met Holocaust survivor Egon Salmon and she realized that Staten Island had a lot of Holocaust stories.

"Egon's father's story of being in Dachau and then released, and the Nazis allowing a Jewish family to flee who came straight to Staten Island, really was at the intersection of two things I'm so passionate about: Holocaust remembrance and local history," said Weintraub.

In 2011, Selfhelp Community Services estimated that approximately 653 Holocau-ust survivors would be living in the thor- ough of Staten Island. In 2020, they expect that number to fall to 36. Weintraub wanted to connect students with survivors in their community so that they would feel more connected to them.

They learned the story of Margot Capel, who escaped Germany as a child but never saw her parents again; Romi Cohen, who was the youngest partisan to fight the Nazis and who saved more than 50 families from persecution; Gali Hold, who survived the deportation, and became a hero after the war; Rachel Roth who smuggled in guns.

SEE STUDENTS, D6

Holocaust survivor Rachel Roth reveals her number tattoo from Auschwitz to Wagner College students after the performance of 2019’s "In Light of One Another."

Shira Stoll, Staten Island Advance

In this 2018 Advance file photo, Wagner College students perform "In Light of One Another," a musical that portrays the lives of six Staten Island survivors. Shira Stoll, Staten Island Advance

Students

FROM: The story of the 2017. McCarthy and Wein- traub received a $5,000 grant from the Leon- ard B. Kahn Foundation through Wagner College trustee Marc Lebowitz. The grant was meant to expand the work and impact Jewish Life in New Jersey and allowed funds for hiring a director and a composer.

One Award winning author and writer Martin Moses was hired to co-write the piece with Weintraub. Grammy nominated orchestrator and composer David Dalbout was brought on to write original music for the play. McCarthy directed the show.

The first Full production of the idea, "In Light of One Another" premiered March 21, 2018, at Wagner College.

Twelve Wagner College students who took the LCO class performed the testimony of six Holocaust survivors from Germany, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania.

McCarthy said that the students were the project people to portray those real life sto- ries.

"They come in with a genuine curiosity about the people that they're studying. They just really want to honor these real life sto- ries," she said. The survivors whose stories were told in the play sat in the audience, captivated by their own words being recited back to them. (The survivors) moved to win the favor of their presence, they are like rock stars to us," McCarthy said.

And those kids were sobbing when they met those heroes."

"In Light of One Another" was performed five times at Wagner College and traveled to two New Jersey synagogues.

One year later, it evolved into a new rev- ival of the show directed by Mickey Tem- nebaum called "Ring Us: Young Holocaust Heroes." Temnebaum revisits the play with Wagner College theater students, and it pre- miered at the St. George Theatre in April to commemorate Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day).

The play will be performed again at the St. George Theatre on April 22, and is expected to run each April for the next few years.

The stories of Margot, Romi, Gali, Rachel, Egon and Hamoud live on another year, through the words of the next generation. We invite you to watch the students' jour- ney on SIVLIVE.com

During the Warrar Ghetto Uprising and were deported to Auschwitz and Sobibor. Egon Salmon, who escaped Nazi Germany with his whole family on the USL Louis and obtained papers to come to America, and Hannah Simon, who lost her mother in Aus- chitz but found her after the war.

Each of the stories show six key cases of resilience, tragedy and hope.

Weintraub was also moved by the works of Nobel laureate, author and Holocaust survi- vor Elie Wiesel, who said, "Whatever listeners listen to a witness becomes a witness." This quote haunted Chantel.

As the students memorized the words of these six stories, they became the last generation of witness to the Holocaust. It was their responsibility to continue the words and keep the stories alive.

HOW IT EVOLVED:
In the spring of 2017, McCarthy and Wein- traub received a $5,000 grant from the Leon- ard B. Kahn Foundation through Wagner College trustee Marc Lebowitz. The grant was meant to expand the work and impact Jewish Life in New Jersey and allowed funds for hiring a director and a composer.

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