

Anne Frank, where have you gone? The death of Holocaust memory



Anne Frank — Mamilla Mall

Anne sat at her desk in the Mamilla Mall looking for a home. A naked electric bulb hung over her head. She was supposed to go to a Jerusalem Holocaust museum until internal politics and money became an issue. She became homeless instead.

Every year, throughout Israel on Yom HaShoah, the siren blasts are heard throughout the land. Traffic stops, people get out and stand by the side of their car for a minute of silent memory. Every year throughout the land more and more drivers use the moment of silent memory to make the traffic light instead.

When is the Holocaust remembered? Is it the annual wintry tributes of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day or is it Yom HaShoah in the spring.

I asked my rabbi about why do we not have a mandated, halachically required day of fasting. We have a fast day for Gedaliah, but not the Holocaust.

Every year during High Holidays, there is a section of readings for the Holocaust that my synagogue recites as part of our canon of service. One year, the rabbi skipped that section. My wife and I went to his office to ask him why? He was clearly nervous when we came in. Perhaps, it was because I was the synagogue president.

His justification for skipping the Holocaust section and the Conservative movement's Holocaust "Kaddish" was that the service was running late. He did not skip it again. He did not do it least as long as I remained the president.

I asked him why the Jewish religious world has not come up with a unified day or prayer, fasting and memory for the Holocaust. He said, candidly, perhaps in a few hundred years, after the passions of the Holocaust have passed and we can develop a historic perspective, the Rabbis might be able to come up with a day of prayer. Right now, the Orthodox, the Conservative, the Reform, the liberals, the Jewish Humanists, can't agree on anything.

I read between the lines. He was uncomfortable for his job in front of me. He was telling the truth when he helped me understand that he wanted the Generation of the Shoah and their meager descendants, of whom I am one, to die off. The rabbis have no answer for God's silence as the children were being thrown into the ovens.

It was not the first time I had confronted the problem of memory. When I was chairman of our synagogue's school board, every year enraged parents came in

to complain. We had over 300 students and always something we did was not right. We carefully adhered to Montgomery County, Md. Board of Jewish Education guidelines, especially when it came to the one day a year we taught about the Holocaust. And every year, parents came in furious. How dare we traumatize their children....

Running the Jewish American Society for Historic Preservation, I am frequently approached with Jewish project requests for memory. One painful request came from Pa. A synagogue with a formerly larger survivor population had created a magnificent Holocaust research center in the shul. Every Yom Hashoah, for their annual shul memorial service, they placed a series of historic interpretive panels, with pictures, in the hallway outside the entrance to where their services were to be held. One year the synagogue board came to the Holocaust Memorial committee and asked them not to put the panels in the hallway. It was too disturbing to some of the members and their families. Could they leave them in the Holocaust Research Room? They did.

The survivor population continued thinning. The synagogue board came to the Committee and said the needs of the synagogue were changing. Would they please divide the Holocaust Research Center room into two parts? They needed the extra space for the community's use.

A year later, the board came back to the committee and asked them to vacate the room used by the Holocaust Research library; they needed the space to create a bride's room.

A desperate letter came to me from the Memorial Committee. They had over 600 volumes on the Holocaust and nobody wanted them, they had nowhere to go....

I became curious about Holocaust local Memorializations. On a big scale, working with Warren Miller, the past chairman of the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, a committee under the House of Representatives, we had created the first ever Jewish Memorial at the Buchenwald Concentration Camp outside of Weimar, Germany. Buchenwald was built on the side of Mt. Ettersberg. It sloped down the mountain in descending order of who and what was worthy of life. The Red Cross visited Buchenwald regularly but never went very far down the mountainside. Most of the time, they inspected and reported on the barracks at the top where the Aryan prisoners were.

At the bottom of the mountain, in the filth, swamp, morass and run off, was the Jewish Camp, the "Kleine Lager," the Little Camp. We had planned a September 12, 2001 dedication of the Jewish Camp Memorial. It was put off for a year.

There was a very active period of small, community based Holocaust memorializations in the 80s and 90s around the US. The survivor population was passing at an increasing rate and their need to remember, never forget as they say, became a necessity. Many small, today increasingly obscure, local memorials were created. As time went on, they too experienced a transition.

A rabbi at a Palm Beach Garden's shul shared with me his community's experience, perhaps with chagrin.

A large wall Holocaust Memorial work of art was created for and placed inside of their sanctuary a number of years back. In time, the synagogue community felt that a memorial to death was not appropriate inside the sanctuary. A Holocaust garden was created for memory and contemplation outside on the synagogue

grounds. Hurricane Irene hit. The Holocaust Memorial garden and its art work was destroyed. The rabbi explained his community had not replaced the garden or the memorial.

Washington, DC has a very large Jewish community and had a large Jewish survivor population. Every synagogue had its own Yom Hashoah memorial service. The attendance at the services declined. The Washington Jewish community organized the Yom Hashoah services by grouping synagogues to bolster attendance. It did and then it didn't. Today, there is only one central location to serve the 100,000 Jews of Washington's largest and wealthiest Jewish community, Montgomery County, for the annual Holocaust Memorial service. Politicians come, community machers show up. Six young great-grandchildren dutifully march down the sanctuary central aisle to light a Holocaust candle. They are nearly the only young people at the service. It is a problem and a fact at Jewish communities around the United States.

The Anne Frank brass sculpture was sited at the entrance to the Mamilla Mall from King David Street. It is large, realistic and a very clearly understood interpretive work by 5th generation Jerusalemite Sam Philipe. I first met Sam at the Col. John Henry Patterson reburial ceremony at Avihayil two years earlier. I had been presented with a beautiful framed bronze gift, the logo of the Zion Mule Corp. It was the same as was given to Prime Minister Netanyahu at the historic event that he, deservedly to a degree only, took credit for.

Sam had been commissioned to do the Anne Frank sculpture for a Jerusalem Holocaust Museum. Internal politics and finances, the museum reneged and Sam was stuck with the bill, the Anne, and nowhere to go with it. I agreed to purchase the Anne, Sam did give me a good price, but only if we had a place that was

appropriate to place it. The messaging of Anne Frank was clear. I did not think it would be a difficult thing to do. There would be no cost to the recipient. All expenses were covered.

I was very wrong.

Together, Sam and I explored options to place one of the largest and certainly one of the finest Anne Frank memorial sculptures in the world. We quickly ruled out Yad Vashem. They were loaded with Holocaust sculptures and memorials. The Anne would become lost as we preached to the choir. The Anne was an opportunity to teach to those who did not know.

Over the next number of months we searched and were rejected by logical place after logical location. The Bergen Belsen (Gedenkstätte) Concentration Camp and museum is located between the two tiny towns of Bergen and Belsen. The address is Anne Frank Platz, 29303 Lohheide, Germany. Anne Frank is buried somewhere in an unknown mass grave on the grounds of the Concentration Camp, as are my grandparents. The Gedenkstätte did not want the Anne.

Approaches to Jewish or Holocaust Memorial groups in Berlin, Frankfurt, Landsburg Am Lech were rejected. The Jewish Museum in Amsterdam and the Anne Frank Museum declined the Anne Frank gift. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the LA Holocaust Museum and the Anne Frank Museum in NY declined the gift of simply did not bother to answer our outreaches.

In Austria, we tried Linz, the city Hitler grew up in. That was declined. We had a strong shot at, and it went to the city council for a vote and a decision, Braunau, the small city Hitler was born in. Braunau had a significant PR issue. The house

that Hitler was born in was standing. It is a focal point of controversy being used alternatively by pro-and anti-Neo Fascist groups as a flashpoint. A large antifascism stone exists outside of the house. The government of Austria can't figure out what to do with the house after all these years. It seemed logical that the Anne Frank, an innocent young girl, a human being who was considered unworthy of life, a victim of National Socialism, would be an excellent memorial outside the house as well. We offered the Anne to the city even to be placed in a park somewhere in the city. Our offer was declined, yet again.

In Jerusalem, we had a shot at the Hadassah Hospital gardens but that did not work out. Sam did have one more connection that needed to be explored, Shalva, the Israel Association for the Care and Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities.

Shalva was founded by Kalman and Malki Samuels. Their son Yossi was injured by a faulty vaccination at the age of 11 months; rendered blind, deaf and acutely hyperactive. Many families with severely disabled children or potentially disabled children in utero are advised to abort the fetus and or institutionalize their child. The Samuels refused. Yossi was their gift from God and he has become God's agent to save the lives of thousands of children whom society would say are not worth living.

Because of Yossi and because of the Samuels the largest Children center in the Middle East was created to take care of all, Jew, Christian, Muslim, atheist, whatever. All life has meaning, all life has value.

I wrote up a little piece to the Samuels about the Anne and included a statement that has been attributed to her. It's meaning and messaging is Anne.

“Everyone has inside of him a piece of good news. The good news is that you don’t know how great you can be! How much you can love! What you can accomplish! And what your potential is.”

Kalman, at first, had reservations about bringing a Holocaust Memorial into Shalva. Malki did not. And Malki gets her way. She did not see the Anne as a Holocaust Memorial.



Anne Frank at Shalva, Sam Philipe Sculptor. (Courtesy, Jerry Klinger)

Anne was placed in Shalva, in the educational and learning library on the second floor, in a place of dignity. Sam could not fit the full Anne into the space so he painted an environment around it. A dedicatory plate for my wife Judy is near the Anne.

"In Honor of Judy Klinger, a delivery room nurse.

She always made sure every mother, baby, and family mattered."

No one wanted Anne. Shalva did.



Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial- Boise, Idaho. (Courtesy, Jerry Klinger)

The Diary of Anne Frank used to be universally required reading in public schools. Not so much anymore. Anne apparently has died. Yet, she still lives in a place that no one would have ever expected, Boise Idaho. Boise, Idaho is the home to the largest Anne Frank memorial in the world. Thousands are brought to the Anne Frank International Human Rights Memorial and taught about the evils of hatred and bigotry. The Anne Frank International Human Rights Memorial is a blunt stick in the eye to the Aryan Nation types, the Neo-Nazi Neanderthals who inhabit the hills of remote Idaho.

In the spring, a special tree planting and memorial will be placed at the Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial honoring Reinhold Chrystman. Chrystman, an evangelical Christian, was the plant manager of the Kara-Hortensia Glass Factory in Piotrków Trybunalski during the Holocaust. He chose. He chose to save nearly 600 Jews in his care, including the lives of the former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Israel

Lau and my own family. Yad Vashem has declined to recognize Chrystman's actions in any capacity so far despite evidence and first hand testimony of his actions. Politics and memory is a strange, and at times, an unpleasant, living animal.

Sam Philipe has the mold for the Anne Frank sculpture. We agreed if an appropriate, public home can be found for another Anne, we would be willing to place it.

A new effort to place Anne at Freedom Square in Budapest has just failed.