PEBBLES FOR PEACE:
THE IMPACT OF HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

“Studying the Shoah (Holocaust) forces students to consider what it means to be human and humane by examining the full continuum of individual behavior, from ultimate evil to ultimate good” (Lindquist, 2011, p. 26). The Pebbles for Peace project was created with the intention to explore these character extremes and to provide tangible examples of choices that can be made in life. This thesis is an autoethnographic exploration of the Pebbles for Peace project that will include the researcher’s narrative reflection on her personal journey through education, specifically Holocaust education, as well as observations of the impact on classroom participation in the project.
This thesis has been a labour of love from beginning to end. I have undergone a personal transformation, stepping off the beaten path a number of times and travelling down paths that I had never anticipated. The experience has been rich and fulfilling and I am truly blessed to have met the incredible people that have opened their hearts and minds and shared a piece of themselves with me on this journey. I am a better person because of you and I thank you.

To Grace – you encouraged me to take the first step. You have been a guiding light and inspiration throughout this journey and I thank you.

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To Linda – thank you for your friendship, guidance and trust. Look at where dreaming big has taken us!

To the students – I learn from you each and every day. You are a gift. Everything that I do, I do for you.
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CHAPTER 1:
INTRODUCTION

“When asked, “How can you bear to teach the Holocaust?” researcher C.W. Syndor gave as his response, “How can we not?” (Cited in Lindquist, 2011, p. 28).

Purchasing a train ticket is neither a difficult nor remarkable task. Purchasing a train ticket after travelling twenty-one hours in a foreign country and not knowing the language offers a slightly greater challenge, but still not impossible. So why even mention such an insignificant event? The difficulty in the purchase of the ticket was not in the communication or purchase itself; the difficulty was in the destination. Standing in the train station in Krakow, Poland, I purchased a one-way ticket to Oswiecim – better known today as Auschwitz. As I made the purchase I couldn’t help but feel a slight shiver of trepidation as I contemplated the number of people throughout Europe who had made this same purchase to this same destination under completely different circumstances. I was venturing to Oswiecim for an intensive week of training at Auschwitz State Museum on Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp within the
context of the Holocaust; those who had travelled before me had lived the deadly history in which I was about to be immersed.

While my experience in no way, shape or form would come close to resembling the experiences of those who travelled this route in the 1940’s, and I certainly by no means am trying to make that comparison, standing on the platform waiting for the train to arrive I couldn’t stop my mind from racing to thoughts of what that experience might have been. Books that I had read, photographs that I had explored, research that I had discovered, even personal survivor testimony could not prepare me for this experience: being on the grounds of one of the worst crimes in history.

As I stood on the five-track, slightly run down, typically European, outdoor train platform, I did not fear for my life. I did not witness guards or police randomly meting out punishment, drunk with the power they took in wielding their guns and playing G-d, determining who would live or die. Having visited Oswiecim on two separate occasions one year ago, I knew my destination; I was not travelling into parts unknown to be ‘re-settled’ with my fractured family that I was being promised with a reuniting. I did not face the separation and destruction of my family and community or the terror and dehumanization that had accompanied the occupation of European countries by the Nazi regime and their collaborators. Yet, in waiting for the train’s arrival, I had a constant feeling of uneasiness.
As the passenger train arrived, my ears were met with the familiar metal-on-metal, piercing screech. The train car came to a full stop, the doors opened, and I entered a box that was far from deluxe – straight-back, red faux-leather bench seats facing each other with a large window in between. If you pulled hard enough the window would open slightly from the top to let the stifling heat of the car out. This was luxury compared to the cattle cars that previously travelled these tracks transporting the innocent victims to their either immediate or drawn out, tortuous deaths.

As the train pulled out of the station in Krakow I tried to take in my surroundings. Four teenaged boys were sitting in the seat in front of me, quietly carrying on a conversation, occasional laughs disturbing the rhythmic hum of the moving train; a young woman stylishly dressed with her Zara shopping bag sat to the right, appearing to be heading home after a day of shopping in the old city, intent on staring out the window; a mother and her two children sat across from me, all reading and writing in notebooks. The young girl gave little attention to the box with the brand new Barbie doll and horse sitting on the seat beside her. They were all riding with me on the train that ended its run in Oswiecim. *The train ends in Oswiecim, I repeat to myself – so many precious things were ended in Oswiecim.* I wondered if the other passengers ever thought about this while they rode the train. They all seemed to be familiar with the ride; I assumed it was not the first time they had taken this journey. Did they ever think about the boarded up stations along the tracks? Were these stations sites of sadness and desperation from families being torn apart? The deep valleys and luscious, green forests – were they sites of terror and execution? I wondered if these thoughts ever crossed their minds, or was
this simply the landscape that had become a part of their daily existence, passing by, moving forward, letting the mistakes of the past slowly disappear into the new developments and new life that happened with time.

The train moved slowly through the countryside, stopping at every station along the way; because of the frequent stops we also travelled from station to station at a slow pace. The train moved so slowly down the tracks – they moved slowly then too, dragging out the end to an excruciating journey, draining the last bit of strength and dignity from those on the train. We passed roadways where passersby were forced to stop for our train to pass. Impatience could be seen in the drivers through the drumming of their fingers on the steering wheel and the way in which the vehicles were slowly inching forward. Today, life stopped for the train to pass as it slowly rolled down the tracks. Life had been stopped for millions on these tracks in the past.

Each station that passed seemed to add weight to my heart. Why was I doing this? What was I thinking venturing all this way on my own? Why put myself through this emotional distress and turmoil? The clouds thickened and despite the humidity and heat given off by the late day sun that sporadically peaked through the clouds, a chilling breeze passed through the rail car, chilling me to the bone.

Graffiti marked each station - whether it was boarded up or remained a working rail station. The colourful designs, both words and images, seemed to offer a bit of normalcy to the experience. Having travelled through Italy several years earlier by train, graffiti -
in my mind - had become a comfortable aspect of the European landscape. Bright
colours and cartoon images to lighten the dreariness and degradation of the deteriorating
buildings. Most of the words were foreign to me, much of it celebrating and supporting
different football teams so I had been told on a previous journey to Poland. I had been
drifting in and out of my thoughts when I was sharply snapped back to reality – ‘Anty-
Jude’, along with a Star of David was spray painted in a bright orange, simple, thin line,
capital letter, free-hand font on the side of a rail station. I grabbed my camera in order to
record this sight, something that I felt was necessary as I knew I would think back to the
image in my mind and question the validity of the memory due to the state of fatigue
under which I was operating.

As the train pulled out of the station I frantically scanned the walls for any further
messages of hate or intolerance. I was alert. As the train pulled out of the station I started
wondering if I had missed other anti-Semitic messages disguised in the artistic graffiti
that littered the stations along the way. I searched for the name of the station to be able to
record the town and find it at a later date in relation to Oswiecim. The need for
identifying the distance to Oswiecim quickly became unnecessary. The train had very
little time to build up any speed as we pulled into the next station only a short distance
away – Oswiecim. The spray-painted, anti-Semitic graffiti on the side of the railway
station ended up being a single stop before Oswiecim – the town that notoriously became
the symbol of ‘Anty-Jude’ action in the 1940’s. With the history of not only the town,
but the entire country, continent and even the world, how could the words ‘Anty-Jude’
along with all of its insidiousness be so publicly displayed in such close proximity to Auschwitz-Birkenau?

One year earlier, I had embarked on my first journey to Poland with sincere, yet naïve intentions. The luxury of time and experience, of course, now allows me this insight when reflecting back on the journey. When I first travelled to Poland I felt that I would return home with answers. I would grasp the unimaginable hatred that resulted in the Holocaust and be able to take this newfound knowledge and share it with the students whom I taught on a daily basis. I certainly was able to see the Holocaust through a lens that is only allowed after having stood on the grounds and, as author and victim of torture survivor Marina Nemat once stated, having come “face to face with human cruelty” and the capability of humanity at its worst – walking the soil that carried the burden of the despised, feeling the air that sucked the breath out its victims, listening to the sounds of absence from fence-post to barrack to guard tower, and witnessing the souls that had been forced to find their resting place forever on these grounds - did I see things differently upon my return? Yes. Did I have all the answers I was looking for? No. In fact, the questions had multiplied ten-fold. With each visit the questions continued to multiply. Sitting on the train and travelling into the depths of this terrible crime in history was no exception. How could this hatred still exist? As an educator it reinforced not only the importance of ensuring that Holocaust education was a part of my classroom, it illustrated the NEED for Holocaust education to be in EVERY classroom.
Several years prior to this journey to Poland, as a result of drive and determination of the students who I was teaching, I had started a project called Pebbles for Peace. This project, which at its core was commemorating the Jewish victims of the Holocaust and creating a tangible record of what six million actually looked like through the collecting of six million pebbles, became – and continues to be - the foundation of peace education at the school. It allowed both the staff and students to create connections: connections between the past and the present; connections between global and local events; connections between each other and the ways in which we treat those around us. The lessons and discussions that built the project from a small school initiative to a much larger community project allowed us to investigate the “…issues that stand as moral and ethical challenges within the larger framework of humanity” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 85). Students were able to delve into ‘real’ history and ‘real’ stories. They were given a voice, an opportunity to speak about incredible stories carried out by real people, and witnessed firsthand what it meant to be human and humane. Characteristics such as respect, integrity, empathy, courage and responsibility were no longer words on a page or ways we defined fictional characters, they were real character attributes that defined real people’s lives – choices that illustrated deep caring, choices that real people made each day that determined their moral values and beliefs; values and beliefs that we could understand because they represented choices that we faced each day as well. The Pebbles for Peace project, while including education on the harsh facts of the Holocaust, has a focus on “soul, love and wisdom,” keys that are identified by researcher Grace Feuerverger as being essential to creating a meaningful curriculum for our children today.
“Holocaust education is a comparatively recent phenomenon” within the realm of education in the Western world (Short, 2003, p. 280). Until the late 1970’s, the Holocaust received very little attention. Holocaust is defined by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as “the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators.

‘Holocaust’ is a word of Greek origin meaning ‘sacrifice by fire.’ The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were ‘racially superior’ and that the Jews, deemed ‘inferior,’ were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community”. The limited inclusion of Holocaust education in schools until the 1970’s is often seen as rooted in several reasons: the need for those who survived the atrocities to rebuild their lives and move forward and the unpreparedness of the rest of the world to
face the realities of what had happened. For the survivors themselves, there was a desire to put the past behind them and move forward. According to research by Nurith Ben-Bassat, survivors wished to “concentrate on the future” and “normalize their lives” – at least as much as was possible (Ben-Bassat, 2000, p. 404). Toronto Holocaust survivor Faigie Libman shares her story of survival with students in the greater Toronto area on a regular basis throughout the year - for many years she did not. Faigie would silence her mother who wanted to speak by saying: “Mother, the children.” Not wanting to traumatize her children or relive the past herself, she repeatedly asked her mother not to talk about their harrowing story that included the murder of her father in Dachau Concentration Camp along with her own internment in Stutthoff Concentration Camp. There are many survivors like Faigie to support Ben-Bassat’s findings – wanting to move forward without looking back.

For those that liberated the camps and vowed to share what they had seen with the world in order to prevent future acts of genocide, Ben-Bassat claims that the allied soldiers also “tried hard to suppress memories of the horrors they saw” by distancing “themselves from sights they found incomprehensible, so that they could return to normal life after the long and bloody war” (Ben-Bassat, 2000, pp. 403-404). Their focus had shifted from fighting a war to building a future, “getting an education, establishing a family, and advancing professionally” (Ben-Bassat, 2000, p. 407). The lessons they learned would not be forgotten, but to explicitly discuss what they witnessed was not an option. Who could blame them? Who would want to hear such horrific stories, and who – if they had not experienced it – would understand?
On two separate occasions I was approached by relatives of allied soldiers to donate photographs taken by their loved ones to be used for educational purposes. These photographs had been stored away by their photographers and few stories were ever shared with relatives about them and the circumstances that led to the photos being taken; however, the haunting, horrific nature of the photos requires little explanation. Allied soldiers, shortly following the liberation of Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp in Germany, took both sets of photos.

The first collection of photos shared with me were taken by an allied soldier who had travelled with a professional photographer documenting evidence of the camps for the allied forces. Photos of the barracks, the ovens, the piles of bodies and the mass graves of Bergen Belsen were taken at slightly different angles from the professional photographer’s. These photos had been printed in Germany before he returned home. Following his death, his wife came across the small envelope filled with photos, buried away in a drawer, yellowed with time. Upon opening the envelope and sharing the photos with her relatives, choices that her husband had made with regards to the treatment of others and his personal morals and belief with which he raised his children and interacted with family members became clear. When donating the photos, his nephew recounted his uncle’s actions with nieces and nephews stating that there was no tolerance for any type of argument. If there was a disagreement or difference of opinion, it was talked out – no one left angry. He claimed everyone in the family knew that you
didn’t fight around his uncle. The stories of what it was like to find the camps such as Bergen Belsen and dispose of the bodies were not shared.

Similarly, the second group of photos that were donated were brought in following the passing of the photographer. He was a pediatrician in the Canadian army. As the allies advanced, liberating the oppressed people under Nazi occupation, there was concern they would be seen as a new oppressor rather than a liberator. It was determined that the best approach for the allied forces was to send pediatricians into villages immediately following the frontlines. What better way to win the hearts of the women in the village than to care for their children? While the majority of this soldier’s experience was in Holland, he was assigned to Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp and the care of survivors following its liberation. This allied soldier also took photos to capture the memory of this extreme hatred and intolerance. Photos of emaciated, skeletal bodies of survivors that required the support of a doctor or nurse to stand, were printed following the war and put away. While there was some family knowledge of the existence of these photos, some stories had been shared about his wartime experiences at some point in time, World War II and most of his memories of Bergen Belsen passed with him in his death.

Even with a personal account of the experiences that accompanied these photographs, words would be inadequate. The photos offer something much more powerful, they “…give the victims a face…” (Macgilchrist & Christophe, 2011, p. 154). There is a stark contrast between seeing a piece of land identified as a mass grave with a rough marker indicating 1,500 bodies lie underneath the soil and seeing the roughly dug open
pits with the piles of emaciated bodies piled inside. These photos show us who are buried in these crudely marked graves. As advocated by many researchers in the field of Holocaust education, one of the key components in Holocaust education is the need to make personal connections for students to the story of the past. This cannot simply be done through numbers. As Russian Communist leader Josef Stalin stated, “One death is a tragedy; a million is a statistic.” Putting faces to those involved, connecting students with the human side to the history connects them to all humanity. And isn’t that what education should be about? Making our children human? Introducing out students to opportunities of deep caring, providing opportunities to raise their voice and supporting them in taking action to create positive change?

There are two key events in our past that are repeatedly identified as creating a window of opportunity to introduce Holocaust education into schools. Both events are consistently identified by researchers and survivors alike as turning points, not only for bringing Holocaust education into schools and the realm of academic research and discourse, but also for creating public knowledge and opening up public discussion on the Holocaust. These events gave survivors the courage to speak – maybe someone did want to hear their stories. The first event in bringing the Holocaust to the forefront of people’s minds was the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, who is often referred to as the ‘Architect’ of the Holocaust. “The main significance of the trial was that it made possible for the first time, nearly twenty years after the war’s end, intellectual discussion of the Holocaust.” (Ben-Bassat, 2000, p. 406). The Eichmann trial enabled the Holocaust to enter the public realm, to be spoken about publically. Survivors took the stand to explain their personal
experience of hell resulting from Eichmann’s ruthless orders. The world watched on television, newsreels and read about the court proceedings and survivor testimony in their daily newspapers, bringing a twenty-year-old history back to life.

The second event that marked the journey of Holocaust education into mainstream dialogue was the airing of the mini-series *Holocaust* starring Meryl Streep and James Woods on a national television station in 1978. *Holocaust* is the story of the fictional German Weiss family living in Berlin and all of their tragedies and triumphs. Their story is intertwined with the fate of European Jews during the 1930’s and 1940’s. Approximately 120 million viewers tuned in to watch the program (Ben-Bassat, 2000, p. 408). Again, the Holocaust entered the public domain, stepping into the private living rooms of the average North American citizen, making it a subject that was no longer taboo in North America.

Cinema has often been a catalyst for introducing and placing value on social issues in mainstream society. In fact it was film teams, cameramen that captured the “…full impact of the Final Solution . . . the horrors that remained after the liberation of the camps” (Doneson, 2002, p. 4). Under orders from American General Dwight D. Eisenhower to record the horrors, film teams entered camps like Bergen-Belsen soon after liberation and captured the images that continue to haunt our world today: limp, emaciated bodies being carried to safety, piles of decomposing bodies stacked like cord wood being bulldozed into mass graves, and allied soldiers, overcome with the inhumanity.
Just ten years following the liberation of the camps in 1955, French filmmaker Alan Resnais released *Night and Fog*, a short film that attempted to capture the horrors of the concentration camp. While this short film did not cause an immediate stir, it remains widely used in classrooms today by teachers trying to provide insight into the experience of the Holocaust. Claude Lanzmann’s nine and a half hour *Shoah* is a remarkable record of the events of the Holocaust. While forty years had passed, the Holocaust was just entering into mainstream society as an acceptable topic of conversation. Lanzmann ventured into Poland, Germany, and other countries occupied by the Nazi regime to interview survivors, bystanders and perpetrators. Using only testimony and not a single piece of archival footage, Lanzmann captured an intimate portrait of the events of the Holocaust along with the terrifying revelation that the hatred had not died with the liberation of the concentration camps and the end of the war. In a recent interview speaking about the continued significance of the Holocaust and his documentary, Lanzmann stated, “The proof is not the corpses; the proof is the absence of corpses. There were special details who gathered the dust and threw it into the wind or into the rivers. Nothing of them remained” (Jeffries, 2011). Another series that was aired on television, Lanzmann’s *Shoah* is, today, featured in film festivals and often referenced in Holocaust education texts as providing primary evidence in the documentation of the consequences and impact of genocide.

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1 Hebrew term for Holocaust
If the mini-series *Holocaust* introduced the subject to society, Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* sealed the topic of the Holocaust into world history. Documenting the Holocaust was not uncharted territory for Spielberg as he had already pursued the documentation of the Holocaust by interviewing survivors from all over the world to record their testimony. Spielberg’s *The Shoah Files* were recorded with the intent to capture the stories of those that had lived through the horrors, a permanent record of history, as well as to address the rising tide of deniers, those that claimed the Holocaust either did not happen, or did not happen to the extent that the world was giving it credit. *Schindler’s List* respected the story of the survivors, but entered the new field of heroism – the rescuer – telling the story of Oskar Schindler, a German businessman, member of the Nazi party, who rescued approximately 1,200 Jews by employing them in his enamelware factory. Filming in Poland, the heart of the crime so to speak, Spielberg opened the world’s eyes to the horrors of the Holocaust through a cinematic portrayal of Schindler and his Jews’ lives – an Academy Award® winning cinematic portrayal of the Holocaust. Not only was the knowledge of the Holocaust a part of mainstream discourse, it had been now been recognized by a voting body that offered further validation to its significance.

The journey for Holocaust education in the cinematic form has made great strides from the 1970’s until present day; however, there appears to be a general reluctance to consistently include Holocaust education in the mainstream education system, particularly in Canada. Wilson Frampton investigated the coverage of Holocaust education in history textbooks in 1991. His findings were consistent – limited
explanation and content on the Holocaust. When pursing an explanation for the lack-luster coverage available in the widely used textbooks, publishers stated that it was due to “…concern for coverage instead of mastery” (Frampton, 1991, p. 34). They stated that subjects were dependent on teachers who reviewed the works and the coverage reflected the time spent in the classroom. A study conducted by Geoffrey Short and Carol Ann Reid in 1998 found that the average amount of time spent on Holocaust education was a little more than five hours. This number, however, disguises a wide ranging practice of time spent on teaching the topic, from as many as twelve hours to a short two hours to cover the entire history of the Holocaust (Short & Reid, 2004). On average, a history book used in North America in 1991 had one page that ‘taught’ the Holocaust. Today, in Ontario’s Ministry of Education mandated curriculum documents, the only compulsory courses that include Holocaust education are in the Grade 10 history and civics courses. There are seven Grade 10 history and civics specific expectations that include Holocaust content: three academic history expectations, three applied history expectations and one civics expectation, which is an open course. These expectations look at the impact of the Holocaust on Canadians and ways in which the Holocaust is commemorated, but the information guiding the actual teaching of the Holocaust is non-existent (See Appendix I for the Ontario Ministry of Education expectations). Carrington and Bonnett identified that “…in a recent analysis of anti-racist education in Ontario and British Columbia, the authors make no mention of the Holocaust” (Cited in Short, 2000, p. 292).
Qualitative research is an area of study that has become a legitimate and welcome form of inquiry. This style of research places the researcher as the “key instrument” in data collection (Creswell, 2009, p. 175). Multiple sources of data are used to present a holistic view of the area of study, delving into the participant’s focus, thought, opinion and/or understanding of the problem or issue being investigated (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). This thesis will specifically utilize the auto-ethnographic and case study research tradition from the qualitative field of study. “Auto-ethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 1999, p. 673). The multiple layers of consciousness allows for investigation into the multiple layers involved in teaching the Holocaust – the surface level that includes the facts of the events to place in historical context as well as the deeper emotional level looking at the impact on the
role players (perpetrators, victims, bystanders and upstanders) along with the personal impact felt by myself, along with my observations of the students studying the subject through the Pebbles for Peace project. This qualitative research style requires data collection to take place over a prolonged period of time and is collected, primarily, through observation (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). This research style reflects the “lived realities” in the field setting, both for the researcher as well as the subject(s) of the research study.

This form of data collection will also allow for the lessons to be integrated with the placement of “…personal experience within social and cultural contexts” (Reed-Danahay, 2009, p. 28). As a researcher I can draw on my own personal experiences and place them in the context of the lessons being taught in the classroom context of the Pebbles for Peace project. A narrative format is a powerful tool in the dissemination of knowledge. It provides a personal context in which to study and learn. When dealing with the teaching of morality and ethics in the classroom – both at the core of connectedness gained from Holocaust education - the idea of instilling ‘caring’, in a meaningful, effective manner, narrative enables the learner to make direct links to their personal lives as the story of individuals are attached to the facts that surround history such as the Holocaust. For example, understanding that six million Jewish people were murdered in the Holocaust is difficult to comprehend as few of us have seen six million of anything. For many of us the enormity is beyond our understanding. However, if you present that number along with personal testimony of a survivor, the narrative has a means of clarifying the human loss that this six million represents. It becomes personal.
Student comprehension of the impact of the Pebbles for Peace project – it’s relevance and effectiveness – is best measured through a qualitative approach. Understanding the human cost of the effects of this piece of history cannot simply be measured in a statistical, quantitative manner. The “lived realities” of the students, the ways in which they express themselves and their understanding of not only the content but the ways in which they relate this material to their own personal lives is as relevant to the data collection as their knowledge of historical fact. Narrative format enable the impact to be explored through different contexts and perspectives.

“Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the research explores in depth a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). The Pebbles for Peace project, which began in 2007, provides a key opportunity to explore the impact of Holocaust education in a specific setting, using a distinct program with a variety of students in elementary school. Detailed data has been collected over the span of the six years of the program and represents a variety of forms including documents, observations, and audio-visual materials. I will review documentation that includes field notes, observations, journal entries and artwork that has been written and created by students throughout my teaching of Holocaust and the Pebbles for Peace project. Review of student entries and projects that were submitted along with photographs and videos from the lessons that were taught will be investigated and reflected upon along with letters from contributors to
the Pebbles for Peace project. Analyzing this source of audio-visual data provides an unobtrusive “opportunity for participants to share their reality” (Creswell, 2009, p. 180). This data will also include my own personal reflections on teaching the Holocaust in both a personal and professional context along with journal entries, artwork and photographs that I have created and taken throughout my journey into Holocaust education and the Pebbles for Peace project. Use of all documents collected “enables the researcher to obtain the language and words of participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 180). Again, providing a means of assessing the impact of the Pebbles for Peace project through participants’ personal reflections and expression. Participants have had the opportunity to put thoughtful attention into their work and respond in a manner that is meaningful to them.

The first step in this process, of course, is the initial self-reflection. As Kvale states, in research the subject tells, “what they experience, feel, and do in relation to a topic” (Kvale, 1996, p. 189). This initial stage is written in narrative format. My second step in analysis is to condense the material that has been written, the method Kvale describes as “Meaning Condensation.” Once the material is written it is re-read, similar ideas are gathered together, dominant theme(s) are identified and finally the themes are linked back to the original question in the study. This process will take “the larger interview texts” and reduce them into “briefer, more succinct formulations” (Kvale, 1996, p. 192).

Following the model of the interpretive paradigm, Kvale’s “Meaning Interpretation” will seek to identify the deeper meaning(s) of the text that is gathered. While in this case I am
both researcher and researched, the use of current writing, drawings, past journal entries, letters and photographs will work to generate a deeper understanding of where I am at on my personal learning journey, along with ways in which Holocaust education and the Pebbles for Peace project has impacted me in both my personal and professional life. It will also be used to assist in generating an understanding its role in the context of an Ontario, elementary school classroom.

This qualitative approach is an attempt to capture the “lived reality” of Holocaust education through the case study of the Pebbles for Peace project. How do the researcher and the students respond to this type of education and what impact does it have on structuring their world? This thesis will provide a lens through which readers can become witness to the impact.
CHAPTER 4:
DISCUSSION & PERSONAL REFLECTION

i) A Personal Introduction to the Holocaust

I have no personal recollection of any formal classroom education on the Holocaust while in elementary or high school. I’m sure there was some content covered, meeting curriculum expectations; however, most of my memories of Holocaust education are derived from my own personal education. That education started with World War II. Two of my great uncles, Tom and Gord Pemberton, had fought in Italy in World War II. Tom was killed in the Battle of Ortona, a battle that took place in a small seaside town that put Canadian military on the map due to their gritty determination and ability to successfully overtake this heavily fortified, German stronghold. Gord was injured in this same battle but survived, and was presented with the Military Medal for his quick action,
following an injury, to secure a stronghold for the allied advancement into the town. The family lore that went along with these two relatives – one present in my life, the other not – was a source of intrigue. While we all knew that Gord had fought in the war, we were not encouraged to ask him about it. This strategy illuminates Ben-Bassat’s claim made earlier that soldiers, upon their return, tried to distance themselves from the past in order to move forward, and deal with family not prepared to learn of the true horrors their loved ones faced. There were a few stories that circulated and were common knowledge; one story being that Gord had fallen overboard in the Mediterranean Sea and was rescued by a French fishing boat and returned to his war ship en route to Italy. The second story was about his medal. It wasn’t until my interest had started to grow and I was in Grade 6 that I learned specifics about him receiving the Military Medal. Gord’s citation was printed in a local newspaper and saved by my grandmother for many years before it was shared with me. His citation read:

“On December 9, 1943 during a heavy counter-attack by the Germans on the bridgehead position held by units of the Canadian Infantry Corps on the north side of the Moro River in Italy, Sgt. Pemberton was stunned by a bomb that landed near his position. On recovering, though suffering from concussion, he appreciated the situation and despite the fact the area was under intense mortar and machine gun fire, took a Bren gun and crawled 350 yards to a spot where he could command the approaches to his section position. Just as he reached this forward position, the enemy started to advance. Sgt. Pemberton opened fire, killing at least 15 Germans and forcing the remainder to retire in disorder. This sterling example of courage and initiative broke the enemy attack and enabled our troops to advance and occupy an advantageous piece of ground.”

The idea of my kind, gentle Uncle Gord killing fifteen men is unimaginable and I can understand the hesitation in my parents to introduce me to the horrors of war. However, I was ready to learn about these realities. In fact I was hungry for it.
Fortunately I was able to seek out this type of learning academically, through the support of a teacher. I can remember an oral reading of a classic novel in my Grade 6 class that I found impossible to connect with. I was an avid reader and a good student, but could not engage with the story. During one of our weekly library visits, I approached the librarian to ask for a book recommendation. I had explained my interest in World War II and she directed me to the Johanna Reiss novel, *The Upstairs Room*. She told me that if I enjoyed this novel to come back, she had another one that she would suggest to follow up. *The Upstairs Room* was an account of the author’s experiences during the Second World War – a young Jewish girl forced into hiding. I devoured the book and went back for more. The second book I was directed to was *The Diary of Anne Frank*. This very early introduction to survivor testimony set me on the path of Holocaust education and has shaped the way in which I approach my teaching of the subject. It was through personal testimony that I was introduced to this dark and horrific part of the world’s past. I was not traumatized by these stories, at the age of twelve. I found a commonality, a humanity, a connectedness. While I had no means of connecting on an experiential level with what these people had gone through, I connected on an emotional level. For me the stories, “…spoke about universal issues. They spoke about displacement, about wandering, about fleeing from hardship, about violence, loss, death, about acts of kindness, friendship and courage. They offered me faith in the knowledge that, in spite of all the terrors and injustices, humanity does exist and that I too was a part of it” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 39). Demonstrations of incredible acts of courage and integrity were demonstrated through the testimony. It is this foundation that has provided me with the tools to infuse this humanity and connectedness, this respect and deep caring into
each curriculum area and the approach that I take with teaching the Holocaust through the Pebbles for Peace project.

**ii) Teaching: The Beginning**

I had a unique introduction into teaching. When I graduated from teacher’s college, I stepped into a teaching position at a new, small private school that was opening very close to home. I had built a relationship with the owners through their summer school day camp. I also looked at this opportunity, not only as a great teaching position, but an incredible professional learning opportunity for myself. The owner of the school had taught for 31 years in the public system and was a wealth of knowledge, skills, and strategies. Her reasoning for opening the school was a result of her frustration with the public system in their handling of children with learning challenges. She felt that the current education system was working so hard to fit the students to the programs, that a large population were being left behind, never realizing their abilities and potential because they did not fit the ‘mold’. The school’s motto was “Success: A Child’s Right: Not all children learn the same thing on the same day or in the same way.” This school, which would follow the curriculum expectations mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, would provide the opportunity to allow children to learn at their own pace and to find a lifelong love of education and learning. Connelly and Clandinin refer directly to the school’s philosophy, “Empowering relationships involved feelings of connectedness that are developed in situations of equality, caring and mutual purpose and intention” (1990, p. 4). In order to reach the students we needed to know the students. “The power
and privilege of teaching lies in its potential to connect with every student’s deepest needs” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 35). Many of the students we worked with had become disillusioned with the education system and felt that teachers were working against them, not with/for their best interests; therefore we needed to make a connection with them in some way in order to gain their trust. With their trust we would be able to help them gain confidence, recognize their strengths, address their individual challenges and pave the way for them to embark on a lifelong journey of learning. In the early days the challenge was finding the interest and passion that would drive the students to take the leap of trust and immerse themselves in their learning.

While the school followed the Ontario Curriculum, there was flexibility within the material covered. Specific and overall expectations shaped the program material presented; however, the focus wasn’t always on the content, rather on the learning skills/concepts behind the subjects. We felt that the skills were necessary to move the students forward and prepare them for the next step in their academic career, but the content could be shaped around the students’ interests to engage them and give them a voice in their learning. For example, in social studies / history / geography the concepts behind the subject include: Significance, Cause and Consequence, Continuity and Change, Patterns and Trends, Interrelationships and Perspective (Social Studies, History & Geography Curriculum, 2013, pp. 59-60). These concepts underlie all social studies thinking and learning, according to the curriculum document, therefore are used to explore all topics that are presented. We extended this belief to our own approach to social studies allowing us to explore areas of the students’ interest. Topics like the world
wars, the civil rights movement, racism, genocide, and bullying were ideas regularly asked for by the students, along with the subject of the Holocaust.

When studying the Holocaust, the question of, ‘What is six million?’ was often asked. None of us had ever seen a collection of six million of anything, so to understand that not only six million Jewish people were murdered in the Holocaust, but approximately eleven million people for all different reasons has been annihilated, the enormity of the numbers were simply too much to truly understand.

The early approach to understanding and building connectivity was through personal testimony supported by historical fact. Language class became the primary instructional period for Holocaust education. *Four Perfect Pebbles* by Marion Blumenthal Lazan, *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry, *Night* by Elie Wiesel and *The Diary of Anne Frank* became priorities on our reading lists (Please see Appendix II for a complete list of literature and films that have been used in the Holocaust education program in the Pebbles for Peace project). We were also fortunate to have survivors of the Holocaust visit the school. Former Polish political prisoner Eugene Moshynski come in to speak and share his personal testimony and to help build our understanding of the impact of the atrocities of the Holocaust on numerous occasions. At the age of 15, Eugene was riding his bicycle down the road in his Polish hometown when a military truck stopped and arrested him. He became a slave labourer for the remaining four years of the war and never saw his family again as they were all killed during his internment. When Eugene came in to speak to the students, the deaths of his family members were a part of his
story, but they were not his whole story. Eugene told of the bonds that were created between prisoners, he spoke of the ways in which the prisoners resisted their captivity, and he spoke of their desire for freedom. He shared items he had made while imprisoned – a chess set and a pair of knit socks became two tangible examples of resistance for the students. They learned that if Eugene had been caught with these items, he could have been shot as they were considered contraband, a misuse of German property. Both items had been made while Eugene was on work detail, forced labour for the Nazi regime. The students physically touched a part of history. They discussed these items after the visit and related the simplicity of these items to their own lives. One student commented that he had a whole drawer full of socks and would throw them out with no second thought. Yet the value of this one pair of socks for Eugene that had originated more than 60 years earlier and had been made from a sweater that was stolen and unwoven to be re-knit, was paramount to his survival. Students were able to extend what they learned from Eugene about the Holocaust to the need to protect the freedoms that we have in Canada today – the need to speak up and be involved in our communities. The need to value what we have and not take it for granted. Eugene became the living example of connectedness, demonstrating to the students that the lessons of the Holocaust went far beyond a history class. A parent interviewed by Grace Feuerverger in a study of her ESL students eloquently stated, “...we are all living together and that means that our cultures – we have to bring them into the public – into the mainstream. We have to learn to share what we know . . . if you respect your neighbour then you will be respected” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 97). The students understood this lesson of respect. The discussions following Eugene’s visit were thoughtful comments and questions that investigated democracy,
what freedom means, and solutions for resolving conflict. How do people commit these atrocities? How do people not stand up and speak out? Where did the problems start? Thoughtful, intelligent questions such as these elicited reaction from even the quietest students. Academically we witnessed the most reluctant students become more involved, not only in these discussions but also in all subject areas. They became more engaged in their learning, asking questions, contributing positively and productively to the classroom environment.

Socially, an interesting trend became visible in both classroom and playground settings. Following these intense, meaningful discussions, it appeared that respect was internalized more regularly and independently. Students did not interrupt each other during class discussions, a problem that had initially plagued the classroom. They allowed each person to speak and waited their turn. No comment or question was laughed at or ridiculed inside or out of the classroom. In fact, there were many times where as the teacher, I became facilitator, observing as the discussion was taken over by the students in the class. They began supporting each other with answers to questions or echoing the questions with which others were struggling. In one discussion, where the question How do people do this to each other? was raised, another student responded immediately with “I don’t understand either. They all had families too. What if it had been their family that was hated?” While these discussions intensified around Eugene’s visits and were brought up again during specific topics and themes, they were not exclusive to one particular time of year. Oftentimes the most powerful and meaningful exchanges were a result of a great teaching moment that the students would initiate, for example, when a
problem had occurred on the schoolyard. In one instance, one student was intentionally excluded from a game on the schoolyard by a peer. A third student who had watched it all happen as a participant in the game compared the situation to Eugene being taken away from his family and friends – he had been intentionally excluded by the Nazis. This wasn’t okay and a change needed to be made according to the third student who had brought the issue to my attention. Students would recall a message from Eugene and make a suggestion on how to solve the problem in a peaceful manner.

iii) The Project

In 2007, six years after the school had been opened, one of the teachers brought the documentary Paperclips to school and it was shown to the students. Paperclips is the story of Whitwell Middle School in the small town of Whitwell, Tennessee and their quest to grasp an understanding of what six million looked like. The number six million, representing the number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust, was such an enormous number that none of the students could envision how many people this was; it was too big to understand. We could understand this questions as it had been raised in our own studies many times. Given the challenge of finding something relevant to collect to provide a tangible understanding of the number, the Whitwell students determined that the paperclip, a sign of resistance in Norway during the Second World War, was significant and collectible. The documentary followed their journey from the collection of the paperclips to the establishment of a Holocaust memorial at their school where today, they have an original rail car and a collection of more than 30 million paperclips on display.
Watching the documentary, my students were inspired to begin their own collection. *What can we collect?* was the immediate response to the documentary. Offering the same challenge: find something relevant to collect, resulted in their response of pebbles. In researching the tradition, the significance of a stone left on a Jewish grave has many different explanations, from personal to traditional to religious. The students that made this suggestion offered the explanation that a stone left on a grave indicated that someone had come to visit a loved one that had passed away and that person had not been forgotten. And thus the Pebbles for Peace project began.

We, the staff and students, started collecting pebbles in October of 2007 with the intent to create an extension to our current peace garden that would display the six million pebbles. The garden had already been established in connection to our peace studies. As a school, staff and students, we had wanted to create a space to go to when we were feeling frustrated, angry, sad, or happy and reflective. It was our first *do something* project that we had taken on as a school. There were several challenges in the collection:

1. Collect pebbles from every province and territory in Canada, and
2. Collect pebbles from as many different countries around the world as possible.

As we embarked on the journey, there was also the intention to ensure that as the educators, we were taking an approach to the subject matter in a sensitive and effective manner. While we had seen the positive results both socially and academically in students firsthand due to their participation in this topic prior to the project, we wanted to
ensure we had academic support and guidance to extend our own personal learning as well as the knowledge to support our students as we carried out this project and extended and deepened the meaning and experience. The field of education takes many interesting turns and leads you down paths that you rarely anticipate – provided you keep an open mind and take the leap when the path changes course. While my initial thoughts about this project were based on the students’ interest and the potential impact it could have on their lives, “I did not realize it then but I had just embarked on a quest for meaning in both my personal and professional life” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 65). Little did I know, this project was about to change my life forever.

*iv) Pebbles for Peace: Theory and Practice*

Karen Riley states, “The study of history allows students to probe, inquire, and practice problem solving techniques while at the same time evaluate behaviours which have been influenced by societal values of the past” (Riley, 1990, p. 33). For students to truly learn these skills they require time and in-depth coverage of a subject. She believes that for students to learn these valuable skills along with “employing critical thinking,” students must be provided with models. According to Riley, “The Holocaust as a model has endless possibilities” (Riley, 1990, p. 35). We had already laid a foundation of Holocaust education by including Holocaust novels in our literacy studies, including Holocaust films in our curriculum and inviting survivors to speak. We wanted to continue to include these components, but take the learning to a deeper level – instill critical thinking skills, develop reflective writing and build character education and art studies into the Pebbles for Peace project; infuse Holocaust education and lessons learned from this
period into all subject areas. “If taught properly, it [Holocaust education] can make an invaluable contribution to the general development of the skills, attitudes, and dispositions usually associated with ‘maximalist’ notions of citizenship in a participatory democracy.” (Carrington & Short, 1997, p. 271). The key phrase in this quote is, “If taught properly.” Consistent themes in how-to-teach the Holocaust can be found in the research of Doron Avraham (2010), Geoffrey Short (1999 – 2005), Thomas Misco (2008), Nurith Ben-Bassat (2000), and Carole Ann Reed (2004).

According to these researchers, teaching the Holocaust should include:

1. Consistent presentation of the Holocaust; language and sources used need to reflect the age and cognitive ability of the students;

2. Personal stories/testimony from all perspectives need to be considered – perpetrator, bystander, victims, and rescuers;

3. A study of the specific circumstances - the Holocaust should include the study of human behaviour within the specific time and place in history

4. Making the connection from past to present; and

5. Moving forward – ways in which we can take this information and create positive change in our homes, schools, and communities (local and global).

We felt we had already started with the initial introduction to these topics: moving from the big concepts, inward – external to internal; global impact to personal. The creation of a safe, caring environment within the classroom is integral to the effectiveness of this programming – again, something that we felt we had established. We had gained the trust of our students and would continue to build on the environment of deep caring and
safety within the classroom structure, especially when new students joined the project as it progressed. We believed that students needed to feel comfortable to ask the difficult questions that they had on their minds and that they were able to express the emotions they felt as the program progressed without fear of persecution or judgment. We also felt it was imperative that each student find their voice through this experience and have the confidence to express themselves and their connection to the material. Above all, the content of instruction could not focus on the death and destruction, rather the hope and courage through lessons learned and actions of remarkable individuals who would not accept the hate and intolerance. Yes the Holocaust was one of the darkest periods in our world’s history, but there were also beacons of light that shone through the darkness in the form of humane acts and efforts to maintain and protect the dignity of the victims. Finally, as Stefan Wilkanowicz emphasized in a collection of writings about teaching the Holocaust, we must teach not only that the Holocaust did happen, but that it can happen (2005, p. 53). The Pebbles for Peace project was a way, in my view, of doing something to guard against the repetition of history, a way to take action and create positive change.

1. **Consistent Presentation**

   “Education without courage is useless.”
   (Cited in Lindquist, 2011, p. 27)

There is often great concern and debate around how young to begin teaching the Holocaust. While caution does need to be exercised to avoid traumatizing students, Carrington and Troyna found in their research, “that young children are able to cope intellectually and emotionally with political topics previously thought suitable only for an
older age group.” (Cited in Short, 2003, p. 120). Use of appropriate language, approaching the subject with sensitivity, being aware of the emotional and developmental readiness of each individual student, creating a culture of caring within the classroom environment and opening up lines of communication for students, teachers, and parents as a team of learners allows for the topic to be approached. While the students were grouped into similar age and/or ability groups within the school, the Pebbles for Peace project was an initiative for the whole school, Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8. Holocaust education with the Grades 6, 7 and 8 students was more in-depth and offered more detail to the historic facts of the event in comparison to the younger grades; however, we did not avoid using the appropriate terminology or explaining the history when questions were asked. As Ruth Shoemaker asserts, “appropriateness of various approaches is determined by students’ developmental readiness” (Shoemaker, 2003, p. 192). We were highly cognizant of each child’s readiness and it was reflected in our daily lessons and activities. We evaluated student readiness based on a number of factors. We listened for questions that demonstrated an ability to seek deeper meaning in their academic work in all subject areas, including current events and novel studies. We observed and recorded comments that were being shared, evaluating whether the student was able to offer thoughts and ideas that related past experiences to the new material that was being presented. We evaluated the emotional readiness of the students based on their interactions with teachers and peers. We looked for opportunities that the students shared where they demonstrated empathy, responsibility, respect, integrity, and courage both in through their words and in their actions. Finally, we looked for interest in the topic. There was no clear scale that indicated readiness and not all factors needed to be in place
in order to include the student in the study of the Holocaust as each area is further
developed through the experience; however, these were all factors that contributed to our
decision of how in-depth to present the topic.

With the older students I witnessed, “…studying the Shoah becomes a vehicle that allows
students to engage in sophisticated conversations that stretch their understanding of the
world and their ability to evaluate the many complex, multilayered moral situations they
will encounter as adults” (Lindquist, 2011, p. 28). In one lesson that was based on
Holocaust survivor Simon Wiesenthal’s story *The Sunflower*, the topic of forgiveness was
raised. On a forced labour detail at a hospital, Wiesenthal had been taken to the bedside
of a dying Nazi soldier. This soldier’s Catholic upbringing had led him to seek
absolution before death in order to reach the afterlife. The soldier had asked for a “Jew”
and Wiesenthal was delivered. This soldier confessed to horrific actions he had
personally taken against entire Jewish communities, including locking one community of
Jewish citizens in their local synagogue and burning it to the ground, shooting anyone
that tried to escape. When asked for forgiveness, Wiesenthal said nothing; he left the
room. His explanation was that he was not able to grant forgiveness for something that
was not done directly to him. By granting forgiveness he would have accepted Nazi
ideology of Jews as one being, one interchangeable with the next possessing one singular
identity. Wiesenthal struggled with his response – had he done the right thing? Was he
perpetuating hatred or taking a valid stand? Wiesenthal ended the story asking the
reader: *What would you do?* Students were asked to formulate a response to
Wiesenthal’s question. The initial discussion began slowly with few students offering
their thoughts. However, once the participation began, it was very difficult to bring the experience to a close. One student who started the conversation related to his own Catholic background and stated that he would have forgiven the soldier. Citing the pressure of Nazi ideology, his peers and the threat of death if you didn’t take part in these atrocities as his reasons to forgive the dying soldier. Another student supported this decision by saying, “he didn’t have a choice.” There was hesitation after this initial response as many disagreed with the opinion. The next student to speak very cautiously approached the subject by asking what if it had been his family in the synagogue. The discourse that followed was conducted in a respectful manner and most students weighed in with their thoughts. The discussion was not led by any one student in particular nor was any idea discouraged or ridiculed. This activity reflected most of the discussions that were held about the Holocaust. Students who previously remained silent in literature and math lessons found their voice and shared their thoughts and opinions. They asked questions in class, then read books independently and searched for information on the internet, bringing it in the following day to extend the previous day’s discussion. They initiated conversations with their parents at home and shared the information they were learning with their family members and, on occasion, with peers in settings outside of their classroom.

One of the school tasks for the Pebbles for Peace project was to send out letters requesting pebbles from actors and actresses, politicians and presidents, newspapers and magazines, friends and family. The mailing list was generated by all of the students in the school. When letters and pebbles started pouring in, we shared these letters with all of
the students. While the level of understanding differed, the underlying topics of respect, love, human rights, and justice were a consistent part of the discussion for all grade levels. The relevance of the study was illustrated perfectly by one of the Grade 1 students in the school. Very early in the project, Global News Toronto found out about the project and decided to feature the students and the project on their *Making a Difference* segment of the evening news. News anchor Susan Hay travelled with a camera crew and interviewed a number of students. We had received a donation of polished stones for the project and while interviewing the Grade 1 student, she held a polished stone up and asked if all of our pebbles looked like that one specific stone. The Grade 1 student quickly responded by picking up a stone from the gravel driveway and answering that we collected all different kinds of pebbles, “after all, all different kinds of people died in the Holocaust.” This student went on to explain different types of people who had been persecuted – young, old, different religions, people from different countries, and so on. When the camera was turned off, Susan Hay turned to ask if we had practiced the response with the student. We had not. We did not have any preparation for how the day would go, who would have the opportunity to be interviewed or what questions would be asked.

While debates surrounding age appropriateness are lively and plentiful, there is support for presentation of Holocaust education at younger ages. A teacher in Ruth Shoemakers study revealed, “Indeed, the longer I teach, the more I think that we need to get at the underlying issues of the Holocaust – discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, etc. – at a much earlier age, certainly beginning in grade three. Yes, there will be kids who are too
young for that – but I think it needs to become part of their vocabulary before they learn behaviour and then essentially have to ‘unlearn’ it in middle school or later.” (Shoemaker, 2003, p. 197). This Grade 1 student’s response in the interview was of his own interpretation of the meaning of the pebbles and the project based on the discussions that we had held in our lessons. At six years old, he had an understanding of discrimination and the consequences of that type of hate when left unchecked.

One of the issues we did initially face in teaching the Holocaust in a multi-age setting was teaching for extended periods of time from one year to the next. The question was how to make the material an important learning experience from year to year without tiring the students of the topic – often sited as one of the dangers of multi-grade level Holocaust education. As Kimberley Ducey stated, “We need to continue to develop ways to make the material intellectually challenging, significant, emotionally engaging, and interesting.” (Ducey, 2009, p. 170). After the second year of teaching the Holocaust in the school (before the Pebbles for Peace project had started), monotony of the subject proved not to be an issue at all, rather the repetition a strength. We were able to take the previous years’ learning and build on that knowledge to create further learning opportunities with different approaches and from different perspectives. “We learn the same thing in many different ways and each way gives us a layer of understanding that builds a foundation upon which our understanding rests” (Shoemaker, 2003, p. 197). The continual development of the content allowed students to question, to draw on prior learning and work to develop their critical thinking skills. The learning was no longer
coming from the teachers alone; the students themselves were assisting in the
development of the classroom discussions and content of the lessons.

2. *Personal Testimony*

“Survival is a privilege which entails obligations. I am forever asking myself what I can
do for those who have not survived. The answer I have found for myself is: ‘I want to be
their mouthpiece’.”

(Ducey, 2009, p. 167)

“It is difficult for learners to understand the scale of genocidal policies when they are
rendered as statistical abstractions” (Shiman & Fernekes, 1999, p. 60). Personal
testimony and humanizing the time period is imperative in teaching the history of the
Holocaust. As mentioned earlier, the photos shared by the families of the two allied
soldiers put a face to the history. However, it represented one perspective of the study of
the Holocaust – that of the victim. “…one needs to reveal their personal stories. . .
Holocaust education should strive to reconstruct identities and stories of hitherto
anonymous victims, track their history, culture, communities and lives . . . to re-construct
the lives – with all its aspects and meaning – of those murdered, and not just their deaths”
(Avroham, 2010, p. 34). To extend Doron Avraham’s assertion, the stories of the
perpetrators, the bystanders, the resistors, the righteous and the survivors need to be
included in this as well.
Perpetrators need to be seen as human. While their actions were monstrous, they were human beings that started out the same way we all did. They made choices along the way that make it difficult to understand and sometimes view them as human, but they must be seen in this way. The fact that we all have good and evil inside of us is a key discussion to present to students. A college professor teaching Simon Wiesenthal’s *The Sunflower* insists that her students understand “most of us could be Karl [Nazi soldier] as easily as we could be Simon [Holocaust survivor]” (Ducey, 2009, p. 171). We all have choices and consequences to accompany those choices – they may be difficult choices, but they are still a choice we get to make.

“We must understand the dynamics of participation in acts of genocide and other human rights violations if we are to empower youth for humane, active, and morally engaged participation in a democracy” (Shiman & Fernekens, 1999, p. 61). Students need to understand that bystanders were enablers of the Holocaust. While it may not have been active participation, the lack of action demonstrated by the average person indicated to the perpetrators they could get away with the acts they were committing because no one, or at least very few, would put any effort into stopping what was happening. “Students familiar with the Holocaust can hardly fail to realize the perils of turning a blind eye to evil” (Short, 2003, p. 285). Bystanders turned their head the other way as their neighbours were being marched off. Bystanders didn’t question the “disappearance” of community members and colleagues. Bystanders listened to the hateful messages broadcast on the radio and displayed in posters and in print, but did not raise their voice in protest. Bystanders locked themselves away when being asked for help.
could be found all over Europe. Bystanders could also be identified worldwide. “By learning about the Holocaust, students and teachers come to understand . . . the necessity of speaking out against abuse of power and the danger of remaining indifferent to human suffering” (Kalisman, 2010, p. 79). It is Barbara Coloroso who makes the connection of the short path from bullying to genocide. The relevance of including the bystander in the study is imperative in connecting the relevance of the past to the present. This has been one of the easiest connections for students of all ages to make. They understand the role of the bystander because they have all done it. Discussions regularly include this terminology. For those that have entered into the study of the Holocaust, they will often make reference to the dangers of the bystander syndrome based on the knowledge they have gained through the study of the Holocaust. Primary evidence in the form of photographs have been used in the Pebbles for Peace project to illustrate the role of the bystander. Photographs of Nazi SS\(^2\) laughing at Jewish citizens who they have forced to clean the streets with their beard while German citizens look on; German police kicking Jewish men who have fallen on the street, faces lit up with smiles; Jewish men being paraded through the streets with placards around their neck as passersby watch – some turning away others looking directly at the men, while others still smile from ear to ear. These artifacts generate discussion on active and passive bystanders – is there a difference? What choices would you have in situations like these? How do you change what’s happening? The questions are student directed and focused on generating deep caring and a connectivity to the past. Entering into a discussion on choice is mandatory.

\(^2\) From modest beginnings the SS (Schutzstaffel; Protection Squadrons), became a virtual state within a state in Nazi Germany, staffed by men who perceived themselves as the “racial elite” of Nazi future. The SS controlled the German police forces and the concentration camp system. Source: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007400
for the bystander role as well. We cannot minimize the difficulty in making the choice to stand idly by, but it was still a choice.

Voices that are less often heard are those that resisted and/or rescued. For some, there is a struggle to include these voices, as the roles they played were disproportionate to that of the bystander. There is a fear of distorting history by focusing too much on the resistor and/or rescuer. “The righteous need to be presented carefully in order to show balance – we do not want to distort the past to make it look like more people stood up and resisted” (Ben-Bassat, 2000, p. 421). The righteous and the resistors represent the “ideal” – those that risked everything against all odds: they smuggled food for the starving; they offered medicine for the sick; they hid those being hunted; they offered a kind word when the world had gone mad; they demonstrated kindness when intolerance was the norm. The righteous and the resistors stood firmly in their beliefs despite the deterioration of humanity around them. They made the choice to do something. The righteous and resistors exemplify character traits that are being promoted in character education programs in schools across Ontario. They bring to life the characteristics that are studied: respect, initiative, integrity, honesty, and responsibility. In the Pebbles for Peace project we have introduced students to real people who made the choice to stand up. People like Irena Sendler, who rescued 2,500 children from the Warsaw Ghetto. Smuggling them out of the ghetto through sewers, in garbage bags and tool chests, she found homes for these children with sympathetic Polish citizens. Recording their names and new identities on little pieces of paper and hiding them in a jar, her plan was to reunite families at the end
of the war. She was, however, reported and arrested by Gestapo\(^3\). After being tortured for days but revealing nothing, the Polish underground managed to bribe a guard and she was released on her day of execution. Irena lived to be 98 years old. Despite all of her courage and perseverance during that time, when asked about her heroism, she consistently responded, “I didn’t do enough.” This model of integrity and courage has had a tremendous impact on the students that have heard her story. Parents have come into the school asking about Irena Sendler because their children have come home talking about her. Discussions about *What I would have done if I was Irena* have been overheard during lunch discussions and on the schoolyard. And this is only one example. There are thousands of individuals who chose to say no to hate and are recognized as the Righteous Among the Nations.

The survivors represent not only their own personal stories, but also the voices of those that were silenced. The stories of those photographed by the allied soldiers, their lives cut short and their voices silenced as a result of hate. Survivors offer a unique perspective – the persecuted that survived. They can share from first hand experience what it is like to be hated, and hated for the most sinister reason – because of one aspect of who you were at birth, something you could not change. Survivors offer a glimpse into the past that none of us today can ever come close to personally understanding.

Survivors like Eugene Moshynski have provided life lessons in resistance and resiliency for the students, and inspired thoughts and ideas that will stay with them for the rest of their life. Survivors like Faigie Libman have shared optimism and hope through the

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\(^3\) German Secret State Police

Source: http://www.ushmm.org
darkest and most desperate of times. Faigie, as a young child, had a Shirley Temple doll that her Aunt from New York had sent to her as a young child in Kaunas, Lithuania.

When the Nazis came to their door, her mother told her she could take one item with her. She chose her doll. The Shirley Temple doll travelled with her to different ghettos and work camps. On one occasion, having been taken with her mother on a work detail at a munitions factory, she returned to the labour camp amidst a chorus of moans and sobs.

All of the children had been rounded up that day. Parents were returning to their imprisonment to find their children gone, never to be heard from again. If Faigie had been left behind in the camp that day, she would have been taken as well. All of her friends were gone and she became aware of the seriousness of her situation. She took her doll and smashed it to pieces. Many years later a kind stranger made Faigie a doll to try to repair the sadness and despair of the past, a reminder that there are good people in the world today. When Faigie spoke to my students and showed her doll, you could have heard a pin drop in the room. Later, as the students moved back to the classrooms, listening to the discussions, they all focused on the doll and the random act of kindness.

In a reflection following the experience one male student wrote, “I think the doll was a way to try to repair a missing piece of your heart.”

Travelling to sites of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe, I have been fortunate to have the accompaniment of a survivor who travelled these paths at the young age of fifteen. He was arrested and imprisoned in Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp along with his family because of his religion – he was Jewish. He and his family were deemed not fit to live. They were not of the human species anymore, race scientists worked diligently to
prove this; therefore they did not deserve the treatment of the human race. This survivor bravely ventures back to these sites of sadness and destruction despite the fact that his mother, father, younger brothers and baby sister were murdered on these grounds. I have stood on the Judenrampe where he last saw his mother and siblings before they were marched to the gas chamber and crematorium. I have walked past the remains of gas chamber and crematorium V where he thought he saw bodies jumping into the fire. Now, of course, we know that he was witnessing the burning of the bodies in 1944 in the outdoor pits because the ovens could not keep up with the bodies being gassed in the chambers. The Nazis were losing the war therefore they stepped up their efforts to complete the Final Solution⁴. We have entered the Sauna where he witnessed his first murder – a young man aboard the same transport train that drew them slowly through the countryside from the Czech Republic to southern Poland lost his glasses in the shower. As the young man frantically searched on his hands and knees for his glasses that had fallen off of his face as a result of the battery and assault he received from guards moving him through the showers, he was stomped to death by an SS guard. I have stood outside the hospital where this survivor was rescued from the hell of Birkenau by a fellow inmate in a rare act of kindness and compassion. Following a severe beating for not working hard enough, this survivor was brought back to the hospital for treatment (the hospital was set up in case of a Red Cross visit, but was also used as an attempt to maintain the slave labour that was enabling the industrial growth of the Third Reich). If your hospital

⁴ “The Nazis frequently used euphemistic language to disguise the true nature of their crimes. They used the term “Final Solution” to refer to their plan to annihilate the Jewish people. It is not known when the leaders of Nazi Germany definitively decided to implement the “Final Solution.” The genocide, or mass destruction, of the Jews was the culmination of a decade of increasingly severe discriminatory measures.” Source: http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005151
visit lasted for more than three days, you were placed on a stretcher and delivered to the gas chamber. This survivor was on the stretcher – but for some reason fate stepped in and changed the course of his life. A Polish doctor, arrested as a political prisoner trying to escape Poland to join the Home Army, pulled this survivor off of the stretcher and gave him a job in the hospital, an act that to this day he credits with saving his life. I have met the family of this doctor. I have witnessed these sites with one of the most courageous and inspiring people I have ever had the opportunity to meet. I have walked the grounds, experiencing firsthand the life-altering impact of learning this history with a person who lived through it. By introducing a ‘face’ to accompany the statistic, students learn to see the human cost of the Holocaust. To apply to future situations, students will link those lessons to examples of injustice today. “People possess a stronger tendency to help those they see as similar to themselves and with whom they have a special bond or commitment’” (Short, 1999, p. 53). Students will be more apt to ‘see’ victims of injustice today and make the choice to do something to make a positive difference.

I can say with complete confidence that most of the students that have been witness to survivor testimony have had their lives changed by the event. One of our academic exercises following survivor testimony is to write letters to the survivor to express our gratitude for their willingness to share such a painful part of their past. A challenge that we always pose to students is to extend the lessons they have learned by connecting them to their own personal lives. The responses are vast, but the commonality is the humanity and hope:
“Thank you so, so, so much for coming and speaking to us. Your story, paired with your positive attitude was inspiring . . . when you look at everything you went through and how positive you are now, it sort of goes to show how small our problems really are.”

“The message I took away was always have hope. After everything you have been through, you are still one of the most positive people I have ever met.”

“You had a positive impact on everyone in my school.”

“We should all have empathy.”

“What I took away is that I can act positive not negative. I am going to make a commitment to be the best I can be in peace . . . I will always stand up against hate.”

“You taught me to be more empathetic.”

“What has stayed with me is to cherish life.”

“I knew what the Holocaust was and what they did but hearing it from a survivor, it takes it to a whole new level . . . It makes me want to stand up and say something.”

“It taught me to accept other people. I can tell other people about the impact of labeling and stereotyping.”

“The most important thing I learned was that if people actually do try, innocent civilians can be saved.”

“You inspired me to believe you can do anything if you have faith in yourself and God. You had impossible strength and believed you could live through it. Your story was very touching.”

“I am so sorry that you lost your family. It makes me want to love my family even more than I do now.”

### 3. Study of Specific Circumstances

“By means of a propaganda machine of unprecedented dimensions, the Nazis publicized their ideology: Jews were designated as subhuman, the antithesis of the race of Aryans that was declared to be the human ideal. The Jews, eternal enemy of the superior race, were not even part of humankind, but a manifestation of Satan, and were compared to bacteria contaminating mankind and endangering world peace, because they were alleged to control both Western capitalism and Russian Bolshevism. The Germans had a twofold purpose ingoing to war: to ensure German rule in Europe and to annihilate the Jews, who controlled the world. Since their first goal, as they understood it, could not be achieved
without the second, they exterminated the Jews with unheard-of determination and ingenuity.”
(Ben-Bassat, 2000, p. 413)

The study of the Holocaust is the study of a time and period in history, it is not to be used as an era on which to pass judgment. At the very beginning, establishment of the key concepts is important. What does genocide mean? Where did the term originate? How do you arrive at genocide? What is racism, prejudice, stereotype, bias? What is respect and integrity? Initial establishment of the definitions allows for further application as the study proceeds. These terms will no longer just be words, they will be infused throughout the studies yet to come. The reinforcement of these terms from year to year with the Pebbles for Peace project has been integral to the continued growth and development of the study. It cannot be assumed that with one introduction to the word, the students have a firm grasp on the concept and a full understanding of what the terms mean. This is sophisticated terminology with even more difficult content to understand. Time and repetition is needed to fully build comprehension.

The importance of the consistent review can be seen in the number of students who have returned to the school following their graduation and have shared the lasting impact of the project. One of the students who was part of the Pebbles for Peace project from the very beginning expressed that the project, for her, led to a clear understanding of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. She confidently defined much of the terminology for her classmates once she was introduced to the subject in her Grade 10 history course. She had been quite surprised to learn that most of her peers had heard of the Holocaust, but had not been able to identify that “religion, physical appearance, age, and sexual
preference” were all factors that contributed to persecution during the Holocaust. She felt there was a misconception that Jewish people were the only victims during the period of the Holocaust.

The impersonal side of these studies does establish a foundation for the personal testimony – a means to understand the individual experiences and a way to be empathetic for the survivor as an understanding of the ideology of the Nazi party is established.

Answer the five W’s: Who? What? Why? Where? When? Also how did these events arise? How were the acts carried out? We tie in the definitions discussed at the beginning to reinforce the meaning and clearly introduce the process with which this was orchestrated. Demonstration of racism, prejudice, stereotype, the use of propaganda all contribute to the understanding. By using the artifacts that exist we provide proof of this historical atrocity as well as a means of seeing how the hatred was perpetuated.

Encouraging and leading discussion around the artifacts that exist, critically investigating the evidence taken predominantly by the perpetrators themselves, we engage our students as critical thinkers and teach the importance of deep caring. If you as the teacher don’t know the answer, admit it and work to find the answer together – through research, through an expert, just be sure to search for the answer. We must encourage critical thinking at this level. We cannot stifle learning the way the Nazis shut it down in the 1930’s. Reasoning at that time stated that, “Germany had no room for two kinds of education – one that educated citizens for the state and another that taught children to think for themselves” (Oppenheimer, 1999, p. 73). I knew going into the project that I would not have all of the answers. How could I when new information was continually
surfacing in the field of Holocaust education: discovery of an undocumented gas chamber in Sobibor, relics and artifacts that belonged to victims of the Holocaust uncovered in Germany, thousands of documents yet to be searched through in Bad Arolsen, Germany with the International Tracking Service. The Holocaust was still a relatively new field of education; there was still a great deal of information to learn about the time period, some of which may never be learned.

While a great deal of research into Holocaust education indicates success and advocates for the increased exposure for students to this education, there are some cautions to be offered. Most commonly expressed is the fear of the study of the Holocaust inspiring children with violent tendencies – glamourizing the Nazi regime and leading to a fascination with the movement that continues to be very active in our world today. Secondly, the fear of confirming, rather than dislodging, stereotypes i.e. the Jew as money-hungry and cheap, the German as controlling and orderly. These concerns, issued by Geoffrey Short, Bruce Carrington and Nurith Ben-Bassat, are important to consider. The Holocaust cannot be a tool for perpetuating further hatred. However, the cautions also cannot serve as a deterrent to reduce, limit or exempt Holocaust education from the education curriculum either. These dangers must guide our practice as educators, and lead us to create curriculum that is thorough, authentic, historically accurate, emotionally compelling and relatable to society today. Maintaining these guideposts, keeping the studies student-focused, encouraging students to raise their voice and explore their thoughts, opinions and misconceptions and addressing issues that may be difficult head on will allow for a successful, meaningful and effective learning experience rich with
connectivity and development of deep caring. As Wilson Frampton so eloquently states, “Education must not reflect the societal silence that polluted the mainstream of humanity only a short time ago” (Frampton, 1991, p. 35). We must demonstrate the courage to teach these difficult, sensitive subjects, not because we have to, but because they offer life changing, ‘aha’ moments that will shape our lives and those we teach forever.

“All twenty years ago it was not possible to consider teaching the Holocaust: ten years ago it was not practical. A decade from now, however, the absence of a Holocaust curriculum in schools and colleges will be an unthinkable omission.” (Frampton, 1991, p. 31)

4. Making the Connection:

“The Holocaust is not only the tragedy of the Jewish people; it is the tragedy of all of us, and we all are responsible for it.” ~Stanislaw Obirek SJ

The Holocaust happened more than 70 years ago, how does this relate to our lives today? Connelly and Clandinin claim that, “Empowering relationships involve feelings of ‘connectedness’ that are developed in situations of equality, caring and mutual purpose and intention” (1990, p. 4). What do we do with this information that we learn about the Holocaust? How do events from the past impact on actions on the schoolyard? How does this information impact on our daily interactions with our family? With our peers? With our communities? What have these real stories meant to each individual on a personal level? These questions are repeatedly investigated in the Pebbles for Peace project. The responses vary from class to class, from year to year, and even sometimes from day to day. The connections that we make, the lessons that impact our lives are
shaped by our own personal stories. I am repeatedly asked what my connection is to the Holocaust. I have no familial ties, I am not Jewish, nor am I a particularly religious person. I struggle with the answer to this question. I feel that to answer with: I am human and we are connected through humanity could be perceived as trite or insincere. Yet, this is how I feel. “When we know ourselves to be connected to all others, acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do” (Feuerverger, 2007, p. 58). Finding our connectedness, realizing that stripping away all labels and barriers that we place on people, we are all human. As Canadian Member of Parliament Irwin Cotler recently stated at a charitable event, “all acts of hatred are an attack on humanity.” The Holocaust was a period where humanity was left behind. If we can find a way to reclaim that humanity, to teach children to have an open mind and to think critically, then we can find a connectedness that maybe – just maybe – will change the path of hatred and intolerance in this world to respect, love and compassion.

Students who have graduated from the school offer a unique perspective when they reflect back on the Pebbles for Peace project. Oftentimes they identify patience, empathy and respect as the key lessons from the project and ways to relate to the topic today – ‘real’ life examples that create a connection from the past to the present. One student felt some people were hesitant to teach topics such as the Holocaust, feeling that it wouldn’t benefit the students. It was clear that she felt they couldn’t be more wrong. Many students, past and present, cite that studying the Holocaust is a call to action, a lesson in the power of the individual to make a difference.
Empowerment, I believe, comes through voice. Allowing students to find their voice – to express themselves, to ask questions, to engage in genuine dialogue - regardless of how long it may take for them to find their voice, is an integral piece to establishing connectedness and making the content relevant today. As Melinda Fine identifies in her study of the Facing History program, “changes in consciousness do not come easily. Connections students draw between historical subject matter and their everyday lives seem profound at one moment and tenuous at the next” (1992, p. 49). The Pebbles for Peace project has provided a unique opportunity for students to find their voice and to witness firsthand the connectedness that we all have through this project, not only from a local perspective but also within a global context. Letters requesting pebbles have been sent out each year to help us reach our goal of six million pebbles. We encouraged people in our request letter that if they wanted to send a reply with their pebble explaining their donation, they were welcome to do so. The letters have been come in by the hundreds and have contained overwhelming, heartfelt sentiment. One example of a letter was from an anonymous source. The letter read:

“I have read the story about the pebbles. I have two pebbles and their names: David and Jackie. Both were young Jews, early 20’s, and they were hiding in my apartment with the great help of my landlady. One morning, very early, June 1943 the Gestapo came to arrest them (someone must have called them) and took them to an army camp and from there I suppose to one of the death camps. I went to visit them while they were waiting for be sent away. I never saw them again, they didn’t survive . . . Yes, you are right, it was only 20 years before the Beatles, but to me it was like a century ago. . . Let us make sure it will never happen again. I am now in my 80’s but I will never forget those two completely innocent young men whose crimes were just to be Jews! I am including two letters they sent me while at the Caserne Dossin in Malines, Belgium, waiting to be sent away . . . to the work camps. I am also including one of the ‘blazon’ they were supposed to wear on their clothes at all times. Two of the young people we were hiding survived and were later married. Michael and Dina.”
This letter, along with the two pebbles that were mailed to us, is often referred to by students as being the most memorable. The copies of the notes from ‘David and Jackie’ along with the yellow Star of David were real. The students were able to see that with the Pebbles for Peace project, they were having an impact on the lives of those that had lived the history we were learning about. Our project validated this anonymous writer’s efforts to rescue during the Holocaust as much as it made the importance of our project real and relevant to the students today. Remembering, commemorating the lives lost, had taken a tangible form – students could read the letter, touch the letter, hold it in their hands – the difference they were making was right in front of them. The connection from the past to the present didn’t seem so distant.

Letters that simply included a pebble touched hearts in the same manner:

“This is a pebble from the beach in front of our house. My grandson brought it to me when he was two years old. He is now eighteen. I am happy to have it included in this worthy endeavour.”

The value of the pebble was evident in this letter, and yet she had decided to share the pebble with us. We now became the protector of the pebble. There is great responsibility that has come with the pebbles. The students are very cautious around the pebbles. Once they are counted and added to our collection pile, the pebbles are poured very carefully by the students. There is a gentleness and care that is put into the pebbles that indicates a realization of the responsibility. One student early in the project suggested we estimate the number of pebbles that per bucket in order to help us move along more quickly. Another student responded immediately and with great concern – we could not estimate as every single pebble represented a life lost and every person counted. These pebbles
were no longer pebbles; they were people. We had become the guardians of these lost souls - the guardians of memory. We, the members of the Pebbles for Peace project, will carry on the testimony and memories that we have learned, we will share these treasured histories with future generations. We are living the lessons that have been learned from the Holocaust in order to do our part to make the world a better place. It is my belief that once the connectedness has been found, it will be carried within us wherever we may go - teachers and students alike, no matter where our life journey takes us. I feel the tenuousness in thoughtful comments and understanding that Melinda Fine identified has been limited in this project and it is my belief that the letters from these complete strangers who continually pour their hearts out to us is a primary reason.

Parents, throughout the period of this project, have shared at different times the connections that they are making with the Pebbles for Peace project as well. For some, they have connected to family roots that had been long neglected. Some have enriched their lives by exploring religious differences and challenging their own personal beliefs. One parent whose daughters have been involved with the Pebbles for Peace project since it began shared that the importance of the project in her mind was the empowerment that was given to her daughters. She stated that schools usually encourage students to make a difference but often there are no opportunities to see the impact of their actions taken. They may take part in fundraisers or food drives, but the impact of their donation is not usually witnessed firsthand. The Pebbles for Peace project, in her mind, is unique because the students actually get to see the impact they’re making – through the letters
that are mailed in, the phone calls and email messages in support of the project and the meaning that it has with people all over the world.

A guardian of two of our students put her thoughts to paper and wrote a letter that she asked to be circulated to our school community. The letter read, in part: “Over the past three years I have listened to our grandchildren express different points of view with regards to bullying and was so proud of what a great impact our teaching about fairness and love for one another had registered with them. However, my bubble soon burst and my pride subsided when I realized the tool that had made the greatest impact on them was the collecting of pebbles for every person who died in the Holocaust.” She went on to address the importance of Holocaust education, the need to search for the hope in the atrocities and the need for an open mind, a willingness to continue to learn and look at situations from different perspectives. The Pebbles for Peace project provided a means for students to see that they have the power to create change; they can make a positive difference in their world.

“…Teaching for social justice is about constructing a curriculum which provides opportunity, incentive, and support for students to do such real-world things right away, while they are still enrolled in school... if they do it ‘now,’ they experience power ‘now,’ and so they know that they can exercise this power for the rest of their lives. They can be ‘actors in their own future’” (Comber & Nixon, 1999).

5. Moving Forward:
All politics can do is keep us out of war; establishing a lasting peace is the work of education.
~ Maria Montessori

Once we bear witness to these facts, to these stories, we have a responsibility to carry it forward. We have the obligation to do something. The Pebbles for Peace project was born out of this idea – the need to carry the message forward; our do something. I believe a reason for the success of the project is the continued, meaningful exploration of the Holocaust. Themes and topics must continue to be discussed throughout the year and related and connected to other topics of study in all disciplines. It is imperative that students see what they can do in their everyday lives to make a difference and how it is linked to making a change from events in the past.

I also believe that if a topic is presented with passion, the students will feed off of the enthusiasm and enter the experience looking for meaning and deep understanding. My own personal experiences: being immersed in Holocaust education during the week of training at Auschwitz-Birkenau, visiting a number of the concentration camps with survivors and bearing witness to their testimony, all became catalysts in my personal quest to teach about the Holocaust. I felt a responsibility to share the knowledge that I had learned. I had felt such a profound impact on my own life, both personally and professionally, that I felt if I shared it, I could help others too. In addition, early in my pursuit of higher education I was asked four simple words that changed the course of my thinking and provided a new drive and determination that I had not experienced before. The question: “Why do you care?” This question was asked of me in a graduate level multicultural children’s literature course. Walking from a coffee shop on a sidewalk in
Toronto on one of Canada’s most prestigious educational institutions on a brisk, star-lit February evening, I was asked by a fellow educator, why I cared?

A little background information on the discussion is necessary to fully understand the significance of the question. A controversial political event dealing with issues in the Middle East was being held on campus. In order to prepare for this event, promotions such as posters and bookmarks were being posted and handed out on campus. One week earlier, bookmarks advertising the event had been passed around the multicultural children’s literature course. There had been no discussion regarding the information being passed out – in my opinion it was propaganda as it only portrayed one side of the story. My view of the event was that it perpetuated hatred rather than offered real discussions to create peace. It pitted people against each other and forced individuals to choose sides. I don’t know if my uneasiness with the topic was read through my silence in the class and this particular discussion; however, during our break the following week a colleague and I were walking back to class when she asked me my opinion on the event. It had been a good friend of hers who had passed the bookmarks out and had been very vocal during the previous week’s class in support of the event. My colleague, herself, confessed to not knowing very much about the event, but spoke of her boyfriend, who she identified as being Jewish, and several of her friends who strongly opposed this event. I did share my opinion: the misuse of vocabulary, the attempt to play on emotions and heart-strings by exploiting women and children in the literature supporting the event, the failure to look at both sides of the story, and the fear that is felt by students on campus as a result of this event. The potential for violence, I felt was, and continues to be,
enormous. When I finished my explanation my colleague - who had been very quiet, listening intently - responded with, “Well, I guess you would care since you’re Jewish and all.” When I told my colleague I was not Jewish, her response was one of shock and disbelief. With eyes wide, she explained the basis for her assumption; my colleague thought I was Jewish because 1) I worked for a “Jewish” organization; 2) I “looked” Jewish and 3) I was dressed all in black. I indicated that I did not work for a “Jewish” organization and once again I assured her I was not Jewish. That’s when the question was asked.

“Why do you care?”

Once I gathered myself together – at this question, it was my turn to be taken aback – I responded with an answer that explained the importance of humanity. _I believe that we need to stop dividing people into all of these socially constructed classification systems based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and so on. I care because I care for humanity. I care for people._ We finished our discussion, with no other remarkable comments as we reached class, and carried on with our evening. However, the question, “Why do you care?” did not leave me. I struggled with the response I had offered as the discussion re-played over and over in my head. Had I answered sufficiently? Had I expressed myself with clarity and precision – did I say what I meant? Should I have posed a question back to my colleague – “Why would I not care? Don’t you care?”
Following this discussion the question, ‘why do I care’, was the source of many writing attempts. I started many ideas for picture books, children’s stories and personal journal entries trying to come to terms with my personal reaction as well as create something positive out of the question – a way to move forward creating a positive difference. Why did I care? Throughout history right up to current day, there are numerous stories of individuals and groups who stood up for their beliefs. Barbara Coloroso reports on a whole community in the United States that pulled together in 1993 to deal with the escalating anti-Semitism in their community. Following a series of events that included vandalism of cemeteries, hate-filled messages spray-painted on walls and finally the shattering of a window of a home that displayed a menorah, it was suggested by town authorities that the owner of the home remove all symbols that identified her as Jewish. Instead, within the community, “Vigils were held. Petitions signed. A painter’s union led 100 people in repainting houses. Within days, the town erupted in menorahs – purchased at K-Mart, Xeroxed in church offices, and printed in the local newspaper” (Coloroso, 2005, p. 213). When the homeowner’s son asked if all of the townspeople were Jewish, his mother responded, “No . . . they’re friends” (Coloroso, 2005, p. 213). I was comforted in reading that I was not alone in ‘caring’, but I did come to realize that I take for granted that care and respect for others is common sense, a common practice held by the majority. I don’t consider myself a remarkable person for caring; I truly feel everyone should care because it’s the right thing to do. How does one learn to care? More importantly, from an education perspective, how do we instill this sense of deep caring into our students today, and provide our students with tools to move this empathy
and respect forward? My belief is through teaching ‘real world’ events – teaching about the Holocaust.
My growth as a result of Holocaust education, both personally and professionally, has been profoundly impacted since the initiation of the Pebbles for Peace project. Immersing myself into the study and venturing into this land of hatred and destruction has posed many challenges and placed me, at times, face to face with a brick wall that seemed impassable. Yet here I am today, searching for more: more answers, more information, and most importantly, more stories. I have walked the grounds, felt the air, witnessed the souls that are forever resting on the grounds. I have been overwhelmed with the enormity of the horror—how do you describe the indescribable? I have also been left with an incurable desire to change the world. My belief in creating that change is reaching out to today’s youth. While Holocaust education has always been a priority, I have been witness to incredible growth in my students through the Pebbles for Peace
project. The project is about a dark period in history, there is no denying that. However, the project is also founded in hope. The incredible courage and integrity of those who resisted the hatred and intolerance. The belief that we each have the power to make a difference, and yes, it is a choice. “We have two paths to choose from: either domination by the old order based on human ignorance and fear, or the creation of a new model of coexistence on the basis of a clear mind, an open heart, and empathy” (Jakubowicz-Mount, 2005, p. 47). As educators we have the power to create a curriculum that is based in love, respect and humanity – teaching for the head and the heart.

Not every school however, can create a Pebbles for Peace project. Reflecting on the experience of teaching at a private, multi-age school I realize, as Geoffrey Short states in a 2003 research study, “primary school teachers are more likely than their secondary counterparts to adopt a cross-curricular, multi-disciplinary approach to the subject and are better positioned to respond to pupils’ concerns with flexibility and immediacy” (Short, 2003, p. 120). Not only does teaching in this alternative setting provide opportunities not found in other classroom settings, teaching multiple curriculum subjects alone at the elementary level opens up the possibilities tremendously. However, this doesn’t mean that we should not be striving to layer Holocaust education at both the elementary and high school level throughout the province in public education as well. Research conducted by Geoffrey Short and Bruce Carrington reveal the interest of students in the topic. Almost all 14-16 year old students in Carrington & Short’s study responded affirmatively to the question “Should people of your age learn about the Holocaust?”
One of the respondents stated, “if people learnt about the Holocaust and about prejudice we would grow up in a better society” (Carrington & Short, 1997, p. 278). Students that have taken part in the Pebbles for Peace project give a resounding “YES” when asked if the Holocaust should be taught in schools. They also believe it should be taught at younger grades and then repeated in subsequent years. One student felt that learning about the Holocaust was part of her “Never Again.” She explained that it had happened again and if we were ever to change the course of history then education was the key. Respect for student readiness is imperative in teaching the Holocaust, but the interest is there. With the appropriate approach the lessons of the Holocaust can resonate with students for years to come, shape who they are personally and professionally and the approach they take to civic roles and responsibilities.
My last night in Oswiecim, following my week of training, I was flooded with the desire to ‘do something.’ A part of my journal entry from that night reads:

As I sit here tonight the rain is pouring down. Will there ever be enough rain to cleanse this site of its pain and suffering? Will the heaviness that sits on your shoulders and pulls at your heart ever ease? Should it ease? Or is this the souls trapped on these grounds begging us to learn from the lessons of the past. Telling us to be vigilant and reminding us to never forget.

I walk away from this experience with more knowledge, certainly more questions, desire/need to continue. I walk away with hope in finding so may people from all over the world with a similar passion. I walk away from this experience ready to fight – to fight for what is right; to fight for those who have had their voices silenced; to fight for the rights of humanity. I leave this experience more driven than ever to care for others and to try to teach the ethic of caring through both personal and professional means.
The Pebbles for Peace project is my ‘something.’ Started as a journey to extend our peace garden at the school, the Pebbles for Peace project has grown into a much larger community, I would even venture to say global, initiative. Because the impact of the project took on such a greater meaning than we originally anticipated, this student-directed, life-changing experience is now planned to become a commemorative and educational destination for everyone. Plans for a Holocaust memorial have been created, with a long-term goal of adding a community centre onto the property. Students will continue to drive the project, offering input into the design and eventually leading tours through the memorial, providing a new and exciting means of finding their voice and moving the education that they have gained forward. The memorial itself will incorporate the natural, rural setting of the school into its design. Natural elements of wood, sky, soil, and water have been woven into the design concept.

The memorial will be guided by six foot square, upright, douglas fir pillars. These pillars are the guardians of memory and the protectors of the future. The sky will be framed by the douglas fir pillars and they will travel throughout the memorial. There will be points on the memorial journey where guests will be denied access to the sky – the darker the period of the Holocaust, the less visible the sky. The soil will also be controlled by the wooden pillars, as the journey through the Holocaust continues, access to the natural soil will be replaced by dull concrete, removing the safety of the natural elements – with the exception of the pillars. Most importantly: the pebbles. The six million pebbles will weave through the memorial from start to finish, providing all guests with a tangible record of six million – the number of Jewish lives taken in the Holocaust.
The experience of the memorial itself will begin with open air. The wood pillars will be there to greet us, the sky and lush soil will be open, and the pebbles will travel alongside the path. Throughout the path, information about the Holocaust will be posted. Guests will have a chance to pause at certain locations to ponder the information that is being shared, to discuss their thoughts or to simply reflect on the experience.

The memorial will begin in 1933 when Hitler came to power. As the path begins, there will be a slow descent into the ground – the beginning of a journey into darkness. As the path progresses, the wooden guardians of memory will thicken and the sky will become less visible. The path itself will also narrow, limiting the amount of space available for the guests moving through the memorial. By the time the memorial reaches 1941-1942, the path will be completely underground – representing the darkest period of the Holocaust. It was during this time period that the Final Solution to the Jewish Question was established – an attempt to destroy all Jewish life in Europe. After leaving the 1942 section of the memorial, the path begins to rise – the wooden pillars begin to thin and the sky above begins to open up. The final stage of the memorial rises above the ground with a reflection pool underneath. The lessons of the past behind us and a chance to rise above, to focus on the hope that is offered by the end of the Holocaust, to learn lessons from the survivors and the rescuers who resisted the hatred and intolerance and make a positive difference in our world today.

Holocaust survivor Chaim Ginott wrote the following passage:

Dear Teacher,
I am a survivor of a concentration camp.
My eyes saw what no man should witness:
Gas chambers built by learned engineers.
Children poisoned by educated physicians.
Infants killed by trained nurses.
Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So I am suspicious of education.

My request is: Help your students become human.
Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns.
Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

The study of the Holocaust is the study of humanity – humanity at its worst and humanity at its most righteous.

Do we not owe this education to our students?
Do they not deserve to see ‘real’ consequences for their actions, be it positive or negative?
Do our children not deserve to hear stories of life? Stories of survival?
To gain respect for difference and find commonality and connectedness to the most distant and indescribable aspects of life as we know it?
Do we not owe it to our children to show them the paths that have been led before them and the connections these choices have on their lives today?
Do we not owe it to our children to show them that they have a voice, and they can change the course of our world today?
This is the power of Holocaust education.

A graduate of the school and member of the class that initiated the Pebbles for Peace project recently returned from a European trip where she visited Dachau Concentration
Camp. Having just entered her first year of university, lessons from the Pebbles for Peace project and Holocaust education have been a part of her formal academic life for six years now. She sent us pebbles and a letter that included the following:

“I knew that the best way to extend my empathy for the victims of the worst crimes was to contribute to something that celebrated life. The pebble project is so special because it remembers the millions who lost their lives, and it turns one of the worst crimes into an opportunity to learn and grow as an individual and as a global society. Each and every one of you are making a difference, and I know these two pebbles that lived at a place of horror and injustice will make a difference in their new home of hope and understanding.”
REFERENCES


Wilkanowicz, S. (2005). Let’s Try to Understand. In Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs & Leszek Hondo (Eds.), *Why Should We Teach about the Holocaust?* (pp. 52-54). Cracow, Poland: The Jagellonian University Institute of European Studies.
APPENDIX I:
Ontario Curriculum Expectations that include Holocaust studies

Grade 10 Academic – Canada 1929 - 1945
C3.2 analyse responses of Canada and Canadians to some major international events and/or developments that occurred during this period (e.g., the Red Scare; the Holodomor; the Spanish Civil War; the Nanking Massacre; aggression by fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and/or imperial Japan; the Holocaust; the Manhattan Project), and assess the significance of these responses, including their significance for Canadian identity and heritage (Sample questions: “Why did the Canadian government refuse to allow the SS St Louis entry into Canada? How did Canadians view this decision at the time? Why? How do Canadians view it now?”)

C3.3 analyse the impact of the Holocaust on Canadian society and on Canadians’ attitudes towards human rights (e.g., with reference to changes in Canadians’ responses to minority groups; more open refugee policies, including those affecting Holocaust survivors and other displaced persons; Canada’s signing of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the evolution of laws against hate crimes)

E3.3 assess the significance of public acknowledgements and/or commemoration in Canada of past human tragedies and human rights violations, both domestic and international (e.g., the Holocaust; the Holodomor; the Armenian, Rwandan, and Srebrenican genocides; the Chinese Head Tax; the Komagata Maru incident; Ukrainian- and Japanese-Canadian internment; residential schools; the arrest of Viola Desmond; the demolition of Africville; forced relocation of Inuit families) (Sample questions: “Do you think that apologies for past human rights abuses provide adequate redress for past wrongs? Why or why not?” “What social, economic, and/or political factors might contribute to a decision to commemorate, or to issue an apology for, a violation of human rights?”

Grade 10 Applied – Canada 1929 - 1945
C3.2 describe responses of Canada and Canadians to some major international events and/or developments that occurred between 1929 and 1945, including their military response to World War II (e.g., the Red Scare, the Holodomor, the Nanking Massacre, aggression by Nazi Germany, the Battle of Hong Kong, the Holocaust, D-Day, the Manhattan Project, the liberation of the Netherlands, the contributions of individuals such as Norman Bethune or Paul Triquet), and explain the significance of these responses for Canadian identity and/or heritage (Sample questions: “How did different groups in Canada respond to the rise of the Nazis? What social attitudes and values are reflected in those responses?” “Why did the Canadian government refuse to allow the SS St Louis entry into Canada?” “Why does the Netherlands send thousands of tulip bulbs to Canada every year?”
C3.3 explain the significance of the Holocaust for Canada and Canadians (e.g., with reference to antisemitism in Canada in the 1930s and 1940s, Canada’s reaction to anti-Jewish persecution in Nazi Germany, the role of Canadians in liberating Nazi concentration and death camps, postwar refugee policy and attitudes towards survivors, the evolution of human rights and anti-hate crime legislation) (Sample question: “When you look at the paintings of Canadian war artists made during the liberation of Nazi concentration and death camps, what impact do you think they would have had on people in Canada?”

3.4 describe some of the ways in which Canada and Canadians have, since 1982, acknowledged the consequences of and/or commemorated past events, with a focus on human tragedies and human rights violations that occurred in Canada or elsewhere in the world (e.g., apologies for the Chinese Head Tax, the internment of Japanese Canadians, and/or residential schools; memorial days such as Remembrance Day, Persons Day; government recognition of the Holocaust and Holodomor and of genocide in Armenia, Rwanda, and/or Srebrenica; plans to build a human rights museum and/or a memorial to Africville; Black History or Aboriginal History Month), and explain the significance of these commemorations for identity and/or heritage in Canada (Sample questions: “When you review various types of commemorations, what criteria do you think have determined whether an event is commemorated by Canadians? What do these criteria tell you about Canadian identity and/or heritage?”

**Grade 10 Open - Civic Engagement and Action**

C2.2 describe ways in which some events, issues, people, and/or symbols are commemorated or recognized in Canada (e.g., by war memorials and Remembrance Day services; through citizenship awards such as the Order of Canada; by depicting them on postage stamps or currency; in museums; on public plaques; by naming streets or public spaces after them; through observances such as Black History Month, Fête nationale du Québec, Flag Day, Holocaust Day, Holodomor Memorial Day, Human Rights Day, Labour Day, National Aboriginal Day, Persons Day, Pride Week, Victoria Day), and analyse the significance of this recognition (Sample questions: “What do you think are the most important regional or national symbols in Canada? Who or what do they represent?” “Do you think there are people in your local community or in Canada whose civic contribution has not been formally recognized but should be? Why and how do you think they should be acknowledged?” “What criteria do you think should be used when deciding which events or people to formally recognize?”)
APPENDIX II:

Holocaust Books and Films Used in Pebbles for Peace Project

Films:
Anne Frank
The Boy in the Striped Pajamas
The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler
The Devil’s Arithmetic
Freedom Writers
The Great Escape
I Have Never Forgotten You
Inside Hana’s Suitcase
The Sound of Music

Novels:
Blumenthal-Lazan, Mary: *Four Perfect Pebbles*
Campbell Bartoletti, Susan: *The Boy Who Dared*
Frank, Anne: *The Diary of Anne Frank*
Kacer, Kathy: *Clara’s War*
Kacer, Kathy: *The Diary of Laura’s Twin*
Kacer, Kathy: *The Night Spies*
Kacer, Kathy: *The Secret of Gabi’s Dresser*
Kacer, Kathy: *To Hope and Back*
Kacer, Kathy: *We Are Their Voice*
Kacer, Kathy: Whispers series (*Whispers from the Ghetto, Whispers from Hiding, Whispers from the Camps*)
Levine, Karen: *Hana’s Suitcase*
Lowry, Lois: *Number the Stars*
Matas, Carol: *Daniel’s Story*
McSwigan, Marie: *Snow Treasure*
Spinelli, Jerry: *Milkweed*
Wiesel, Elie: *Night*
Wiesenthal, Simon: *The Sunflower*
Wiseman, Eva: *Kanada*
Yolen, Jane: *The Devil’s Arithmetic*
Zusak, Markus: *The Book Thief*

Picture Books:
Adler, David: *A Picture Book of Anne Frank*
Adler, David: *Child of the Warsaw Ghetto*
Adler, David: *Hiding From the Nazis*
Adler, David: *The Number of My Grandfather’s Arm*
Agra Deedy, Carmen: *The Yellow Star-The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark*
Bari, Ellen: *The Tattered Prayer Book*
Bernbaum, Israel: *My Brother’s Keeper*
Bogacki, Tomek: *The Champion of Children-The Story of Janusz Korczak*
Borden, Louise: *The Greatest Skating Race*
Bunting, Eve: *One Candle*
Bunting, Eve: *Terrible Things*
Dagan, Batsheva: *If The Stars Could Only Speak*
Friedman, Laurie: *Angel Girl*
Goldman-Rubin, Susan: *The Anne Frank Case-Simon Wiesenthal’s Search for the Truth*
Goldman-Rubin, Susan: *The Cat With the Yellow Star*
Goldman-Rubin, Susan: *Fireflies in the Dark*
Goldman-Rubin, Susan: *The Flag With Fifty-Six Stars*
Goldman-Rubin, Susan: *Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto*
Goldman-Rubin, Susan: *The Cat With the Yellow Star*
Harran, Marilyn & Elisabeth Leyson: *The Boy on the Woodwn Box*
Hausfater, Rachel: *The Little Boy Star-An Allegory of the Holocaust*
Hesse, Karen: *The Cats in Krasinski Square*
Hoestlandt, Jo: *Star of Fear, Star of Hope*
Innocenti, Roberto: *Rose Blanche*
Johnston, Tony: *The Harmonica*
Kulyk-Keefer, Janice: *Anna’s Goat*
Levey Oppenheim, Shulamith: *The Lily Cupboard*
Littlesugar, Amy: *Willy & Max*
McCann, Michelle: *Luba-The Angel of Bergen Belsen*
Patz, Nancy: *Who Was the Woman Who Wore the Hat*
Polacco, Patricia: *Babushka’s Doll*
Polacco, Patricia: *The Butterfly*
Polacco, Patricia: *Christmas Tapestry*
Polacco, Patricia: *The Keeping Quilt*
Polacco, Patricia: *The Trees of the Dancing Goats*
Poole, Josephine: *Anne Frank*
Rappaport, Doreen: *The Secret Seder*
Ruelle, Karen: *The Grand Mosque of Paris*
Russo, Marisabina: *Always Remember Me*
Russo, Marisabina: *I Will Come Back for You-A Family in Hiding During World War II*
Schroeder, Peter W. & Dagmar: *Six Million Paperclips*
Sendak, Maurice: *Brundibar*
Steele, D. Kelley: *Would You Salute?*
Ungerer, Tomi: *The Autobiography of a Teddy Bear*
Upjohn, Rebecca: *The Secret of the Village Fool*
Vander Zee, Ruth: *Erika’s Story*
Vaughan, Marcia: *Irena’s Jar of Secrets*
Watts, Irene: *A Telling Time*
Wiviott, Meg: *Benno and the Night of Broken Glass*
APPENDIX III:

Personal Reflection: Why I Care

Having personally stood on the grounds of some of the sites of the Holocaust – the gas chamber of Majdanek Concentration Camp with the finger marks engraved in the cement wall, the vast emptiness that remains of Plaszow Concentration Camp, the immense grounds of Auschwitz-Birkenau that houses the remains of buildings that go on for as far as the eye can see – I have felt the intense sadness and grief of standing on these sites of immeasurable pain and suffering; however, I have also felt the enormous rising of hope as I listened to a Holocaust survivor, someone who had been imprisoned in this hell on earth 65 years earlier, tell his story of survival. How could a human being not learn something from standing on these grounds? How could an individual walk off of these grounds and still hate? How will we, as a global community, ever move beyond this vicious cycle of hate that we see over and over again if we are still today asking each other why we care? Through the investigation of the
Holocaust and the pursuit of these studies at a young age, we as educators can develop real images of character traits that are integral to the development of being socially aware, respectful global citizens; students that will raise their voice when they see an injustice, students that will speak up for the rights of themselves and those around them. The Holocaust is not just an event that happened in history, the Holocaust is an event that continues to remain relevant today. As Holocaust survivor, Nazi hunter and human rights activist Simon Wiesenthal so eloquently stated, “Freedom is not a gift from the heavens. We must fight for it every day of our lives.” Through education, we can fight this battle; arming our students with knowledge of the past, models of extraordinary character, and motivation that each of them can make a difference in a meaningful and respectful manner.

I need to take a brief step back at this point, however, to review where my journey began. Before the opportunity to actually travel to Germany and Poland to visit some of the sites of the Holocaust, there was a previous experience that really shifted the sails of my direction. This ‘aha’ moment came in Ortona, Italy. I travelled there on two occasions - the first on my own to find the grave of my great-uncle who had fought and died in the Battle of Ortona; the second was to travel with my grandparents and a group of Canadians to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the Battle of Ortona (this would be the first and only visit that my grandmother ever had to her brother’s grave). It was sitting at the grave of my uncle Tom Pemberton that I realized I needed to do something different with my life. Teaching needed to be at the heart of it, but I knew that I had so much passion for this history and here I was sitting at the foot of the grave of someone
from my own family who fought and died in defense of the rights and freedoms that we possess as Canadians today. I truly felt that I needed to continue the fight for him. I realize that the idea of my Uncle Tom was highly idealized at this point – I saw him, and continue to see him, as this heroic figure that ventured off to war to fight for justice. I have no means of knowing why he actually joined up to fight. He was young, lied about his age as so many do, to get into the army. His older brother was had already signed up – was he just trying to keep up with his older sibling? My grandmother was very young – there was a tremendous age-gap between them so she also remembers a very idealized big brother – someone who rescued her from neighbourhood bullied and soothed her when she was crying and upset. I truly feel today that his purpose for signing up is of little significance. The image that I have of him, conjured or not, is what has become my driving force.

The first trip to Ortona created this shift in my career path, it was my second trip that closed the door on my previous path and where I took off running on my current trail. Interestingly, the linkage between the studying World War II and the Holocaust and this idea of ‘caring’ was already present (this was before the incident with my classmate asking why I cared). As I went back through my journaling from the anniversary trip to Ortona, I found a poem that I had written the evening before the commemoration (keeping in mind I am NOT a poet).

Stars settled in the sky,
Bright beacons in the night
So far away from home
Yet guided by the same constellations
Did they guide him?

Waves lap softly on the shore
A sound of comfort, a sound of home
Or the sound of the earth crying for the lives lost
A final resting place for so many in the cold depths
Was he comforted or troubled by the sea?

A peacefulness consumes me as I look around
The swaying of the trees in the fall breeze
The soft rise of the hills that surround me
I feel protected
Did he feel safe?

I am here because of him
I enjoy the wonders of the world
the ordinary and mundane,
the exciting and the extraordinary
because of him

He gave up his hopes and dreams
He sacrificed it all for me
He fought for justice,
to preserve the rights and freedoms for all

I am here because of him
This is why I care

In reading this poem along with additional entries from this time, caring is directly linked to taking action. Caring, for me, also includes being knowledgeable about that which you are speaking. Having stood in the Moro River Canadian War Cemetery in Ortona, Italy, I had created a new lens from which I was viewing the world. I had a new lens from which I was viewing caring. Uncle Tom represented for me the ultimate sacrifice for caring – being willing to risk your life to defend the right to care and stand up for others. My question was how do we create a culture of caring without having to die defending it? How do teach caring without having to physically fight for it? My belief was, and
continues to be, through education. This journey that I am now on has led me to further battlefields – the ‘war within a war’ that was being fought during the time of the Second World War.

I have travelled to Poland on four separate journeys – three with groups that I have organized through my current professional position, one as part of a training program offered through the Auschwitz State Museum. All four experiences have continued to build my knowledge foundation and have, like Ortona, provided me with a new lens from which to view this history and to speak from while teaching. I have done extensive writing and drawing to try to process these experiences, despite the fact I am not an artist or author. However, it is through these mediums that I have been able to start to deal with what I have seen and pass the messages on.
In travelling to sites such as the Wannsee Conference House, the site of the conference that determined the “Final Solution to the Jewish problem”; Majdanek Concentration Camp, a camp with many buildings that are still in their original form, not destroyed by the Nazis as they fled and attempted to destroy the evidence of their crimes; Plaszow Concentration Camp, where nothing remains but open fields and a lone monument to mark the horrific memory of the grounds; remaining ghetto walls in both Warsaw and Krakow; synagogues and cemeteries that illustrate the vibrant Jewish life that was a part of these communities pre-war; and of course the infamous Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp, the symbol of the Holocaust, I have been left speechless. I have struggled with the juxtaposition of life and death at these sites, so difficult to describe and harder still to understand. I believe that I naïvely believed that in venturing off to these locations I would find answers to those difficult questions like why? Why did something like this happen? There are thousands of books that exist today, written by brilliant scholars, but they all include theories as to why and how the Holocaust happened. There is no definitive answer that exists. The first journey that I returned from was very difficult as the question of why weighed even more heavily on me. How could a human being do this to another human being? How could an adult do this to a child? How could an adult do this to a child, yet return to his or her family at night? One of the first pieces that I created is in the photo above. It represented my inability to provide a succinct and sensible answer – it’s a collection of words or phrases...
that came to mind as I wrote and sketched. ‘Why’ is the overwhelming question, however along with that is all of the other thoughts and emotions – terror, fear, unknown.

One of my greatest struggles on each trip when visiting Auschwitz State Museum are the artifacts that exist – the eye glasses, the prayer shawls, combs, brushes, shoes, buttons, pots and pans, the possessions that belong to those that were murdered at the camp. One of the most disturbing items is the hair. Again, my mind goes to the question of how someone could do this to another human being. I think about the guilt that I felt as a child growing up, if I had done something unkind to someone I felt guilty. This was not guilt imposed on me by my parents, it was my own self-imposed guilt. How do you get a point where you no longer view a fellow human being as a human – how do you get to a point where you can mercilessly murder another human being? It is an answer that I cannot find and truthfully and answer I do not want to find. My focus is on ways in which we can work to prevent from reaching that stage of apathy and indifference.
My last night in Oswiecim, the Polish town where Auschwitz-Birkenau is located, I spent a great deal of time reflecting on my experiences. Part of my journal entry from that evening is as follows:

As I sit here tonight the rain is pouring down. Will there ever be enough rain to cleanse this site of its pain and suffering? Will the heaviness that sits on your shoulders and pulls at your heart ever ease? Should it ease? Or is this the souls trapped on these grounds begging us to learn from the lessons of the past. Telling us to be vigilant and reminding us to never forget.

I walk away from this experience with more knowledge, certainly more questions, a desire/need to continue. I walk away with hope in finding so may people from all over the world with a similar passion. I walk away from this experience ready to fight – to fight for what is right; to fight for those who have had their voices silenced; to fight for the rights of humanity. I leave this experience more driven than ever to care for others and to try to teach the ethic of caring through both personal and professional means.

One of the most moving demonstrations of caring that has resulted from my experience with the study of the Holocaust involves my mother. While my mother initially didn’t understand my interest in issues of the Holocaust and genocide, she was always been supportive of my endeavours and has come to realize why I am driven to do what I do. I like to think that she is the very first person to set me on this path. My mother is a model of generosity and caring. Just one example of her willingness to try to ‘right the world’:

I called her several months ago with a story to share. I had listened to a Holocaust survivor share her story to a group of students. At the age of 8 this survivor was placed in a ghetto with her mother. Upon returning from a long day of forced labour with her mother, she found all of her friends who had been left behind in the ghetto that day had been rounded up and deported. Still a child, filled with frustration and overwhelmed with the hand that she had been dealt, she took her one remaining possession that she had been allowed to pack and bring with her when they were arrested from their home, a Shirley
Temple porcelain doll, and smashed it against the wall. The doll was destroyed—it had been a treasure to her. Before the war began she was the envy of all of her cousins and friends because this was an American-made doll, a real treasure. Upon hearing this, I was heartbroken. My mother was a dollmaker and I had grown up with a new doll every birthday and Christmas. My mother loves dolls. I shared this story with her, and together we came up with a plan to replace this survivor’s doll. My mother had recently purchased the mould for the Shirley Temple doll and happened to have a replica of the original dress. Everything just seemed too coincidental. It was meant to be. The survivor was overwhelmed with the final project—the doll looked exactly as she remembered hers to be, only slightly taller. This survivor recently told me that she has difficulty sleeping at night because of the rise in hatred that she is witnessing on the news. The only solace that she feels is looking at her doll who sits beside her bed—Shirley Temple helps her fall asleep at night. The doll is a reminder to her that good people do exist in this world. My mother did this. My mother’s belief is if you can alleviate someone’s pain or suffering in any way, then you help them. I believe that my mother is the root of my deep caring.

Why I care, and why it is necessary to care, seems so clear in my mind, yet is so difficult to put into words. We need to care to avoid these atrocious events that have taken place throughout history. We need to care in order to make a difference. One of the most effective explanations about caring that I have come across is from the Stand Canada website that involves student groups to raise awareness for the genocide in Darfur, “You should care because it could be you.” Martin Niemoller, Catholic priest during World
War II, so eloquently voiced the importance of standing up in his poem that was written as a reflection of his experiences. Initially supporting the Nazi party, he came to realize what was happening and rescinded his support. As a result, he was placed in a concentration camp for his opposition. No one stood up for him.

First they came for the Communists, but I was not a Communist - so I said nothing. Then they came for the Social Democrats, but I was not a Social Democrat - so I did nothing. Then they came for the trade unionists, but I was not a trade unionist. And then they came for the Jews, but I was not a Jew - so I did little. Then when they came for me, there was no one left who could stand up for me.

Who will be there to support me if I don’t take a stand here and now?

Why do I care?

I care because it’s the right thing to do.