

THE EIGHTH ANNUAL HOLOCAUST ART AND WRITING CONTEST

Voices from Yesterday: Letters for Tomorrow

We invite you to participate in the Eighth Annual Holocaust Art and Writing Contest, presented by Chapman University and The “1939” Club, one of the largest and most active Holocaust survivor organizations in the United States. This contest is also supported by a grant from the Samueli Foundation and a gift from Yossie and Dana Hollander.

Each school is invited to submit a total of three entries, consisting of either essay(s), poem(s), works of art or a combination thereof. These school representatives will be eligible to win the first prize of \$500 and the second prize of \$250 in each category in the middle and high school competitions.

School representatives in attendance at the awards ceremony will receive certificates and a copy of *The Holocaust Chronicle: A History in Words and Pictures*, a unique one-volume history of the Holocaust. First and second place winners will receive their cash prizes at the ceremony. Additional prizes will be awarded to schools and school representatives in attendance.

The three student representatives from each school, with (depending on seat availability) their teacher and/or principal, are invited to the awards ceremony on **Friday, March 9, 2007 at 11 a.m. in Memorial Auditorium at Chapman University, One University Drive, Orange, CA 92866**. The highlights of the event will include:

- the announcement of the winners of the essay contest and the reading of the two winning essays (one middle school and one high school)
- the announcement of the winners of the poetry contest and the reading of the two winning poems (one middle school and one high school)
- the announcement of the winning works of art and their display during the reception. These art works will become the property of and part of the collection of the Sala and Aron Samueli Holocaust Memorial Library at Chapman University
- a reception to honor our guests
- the opportunity to meet and talk with Holocaust survivors, many of whose video testimonies are posted on The “1939” Club web site

Background for Art and Writing Prompt

Nazism's rise to power in Germany brought immediate persecution for those the Nazis targeted, including those who held different political views and those who opposed Nazism on the basis of their religious beliefs. Following an antisemitic and racist ideology, the Nazis targeted gays, the mentally and physically differently-abled, and most especially, the Jews.

The first phases of persecution of Germany's Jews occurred through edict and law, such as the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, which forbade marriage between “Jews and citizens of German or kindred blood” and which limited citizenship to those of “German or kindred blood.” The latter law deprived Germany's Jews of their citizenship, making them resident aliens in a country in which they had often lived for generations. Everyone who listened to the radio or read a newspaper knew what was happening to their Jewish neighbors, acquaintances, and friends. There was nothing secret about it.

Yet, even though it was painful and difficult to lose one's job or to be dismissed from school or university or to be treated like a stranger by friends and acquaintances, many Jews thought they could somehow cope with these restrictions and survive, as they had previous outbreaks of anti-Judaism and anti-semitism throughout the centuries.

Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939 and the outbreak of World War II brought a new and deadly phase of persecution, especially for the Jews, whom the Nazis singled out for segregation and ultimately for extermination. On a moment's notice, families were separated. Jews were sent to concentration camps, to ghettos, to labor camps, and beginning with Belzec in March 1942, to death camps. Some parents decided to stay together and to face as a family whatever might occur; others decided to separate in the hope that at least one family member might survive. More often than not, people did not have the time or opportunity to make any decision.

Separated from one another, families and friends tried desperately to communicate—to assure an anxious parent or child of one's survival; to send an encouraging word of hope; above all, to send a message of love.

The three letters below represent the millions of messages that people struggled to write and send under the most difficult of circumstances. None of these letters received a response.

Only with Allied victory in Europe in 1945 did families and friends learn who had survived and who had been killed at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators. Those who survived felt—and continue to feel—a deep sense of obligation to tell the world what happened, to keep alive the memory of the millions who had not lived to witness for themselves. Communicating for their lost loved ones, survivors give oral testimony and write their stories so that the world might remember and learn from the Holocaust; might truly understand what happens when people are silent and passive in the face of injustice and hatred. In a way, the survivors are sending letters to the future in the names of those who did not live to tell their own stories.

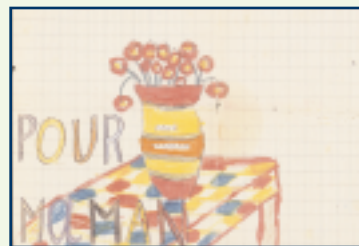
Each survivor's testimony is a message, but a message has meaning only when it is heard—and when it leads to a response. It becomes a message when we tell the persons who have shared their testimonies with us that we understand what they are saying and that their witness is now part of our lives, influencing the choices we make each day.



Photo by Mendel Grossman, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Collection

Following the invasion and occupation of Poland, the Germans moved immediately to segregate and differentiate Jews from non-Jews. Jews were compelled to wear a badge, a Star of David, sewn on the back and front of their clothing (as seen in the photo) or to wear an armband with the Star of David. In the city of Lodz, Poland, the Germans established a ghetto in early February 1940—Jews who resided in other parts of the city were ordered to vacate their homes and move into the ghetto. In late April 1940, the ghetto was sealed. Over the next years, the Lodz ghetto became vastly overcrowded with tens of thousands dying from disease and starvation as Jews from such countries as Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria were sent there. In December 1940 the Germans began deportations to labor camps and a little over a year later the first transports to the death camp Chelmno began. Often, those deported had little or no advance knowledge of their departure and no knowledge of their destination.

Ghetto photographer Mendel Grossman secretly took this photo of a young Jewish woman in the Lodz ghetto kneeling to write a few words to a loved one before being sent to her death in Chelmno. Grossman himself was shot to death by an SS guard on a death march in the last days of the war.

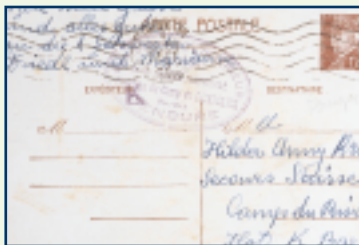


USHMM, courtesy of Alfred Ament

In the face of growing persecution, many families, if they had contacts and the financial means, tried to escape beyond the reach of Nazi Germany. The parents of Hans Ament, the boy who wrote this postcard, did just that. In 1939, when Hans was only five years old, his family left Austria for

Belgium with the plan of emigrating to the United States. The family was among the lucky ones who were granted an American visa in March 1940, but because of the German invasion of Belgium the family had to flee to France and was never able to pick it up. In France, the family was separated.

Hans' father, Max, was deported in 1943 from the Drancy transit camp to his death in either Sobibor or Majdanek. Hans' mother, Ernestina, suffering from tuberculosis, was sent to a sanatorium near Izieu. Hoping to raise her spirits, Hans created this colorful postcard with a drawing of a table with a vase of flowers on one side and a letter on the other. Ernestina never recovered from her illness and died in March 1943. Hans was deported in convoy #75 in May 1944 and was murdered at Auschwitz.



USHMM, courtesy of Hilda Krieser Taylor

It is difficult to imagine the extraordinary perseverance and ingenuity that Perla Kreiser showed in writing and sending this postcard to her two little girls, Hilda and Anny. Somehow, Perla managed to write this postcard while on a deportation train that would eventually bring her to Auschwitz where she was murdered. What is even more amazing is this loving mother's ability to think not of herself and what awaited her, but only of her children. She writes: "We have just gone past Toulouse. It is 12 o'clock. ... I am happy and glad that you, my darlings, are not here. ... In God's name, be brave and good ... I send you kisses from the bottom of my heart. Your mama."

Art and Writing Prompt

The "1939" Club is one of the largest and most active Holocaust survivor organizations in the United States. It takes its name from the year that Germany invaded Poland, changing forever the lives of those who would later join together in Los Angeles to form the club in 1952.

The "1939" Club has available on its Web site nearly 100 full-length oral testimonies. Some of these oral histories were recorded in the early 1980s at the University of California, Los Angeles; others were recorded in the mid-1990s in Orange County by the Anti-Defamation League.

- **View and listen** to at least one video testimony from The "1939" Club Web site (<http://www.1939club.com>).

- **Reflect** on the personal history you have watched. What are the main **themes and ideas** in this testimony? What aspects of this witness have special meaning for you? If you had been sitting with the person as he or she told you his or her story, what questions would you have wanted to ask? What might you have wanted to say?

- **Create** a "letter" (prose, poetry, or work of art) for the survivor whose testimony you have heard. **Tell** the person through your prose, poetry, or art the specific understanding of the Holocaust you have gained through his or her testimony. **Share** with your survivor which aspects of his or her testimony have special meaning for you and will influence your values and decisions.

If an internet connection is not available, students may view these interviews in the Sala and Aron Samueli Holocaust Memorial Library at Chapman University from Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please contact Jessica Cioffi, Holocaust Education Coordinator, at (714) 628-7377 regarding access to video testimony and scheduling a visit.

We encourage teachers to consult:

<http://www.chapman.edu/holocausteducation> for lesson plans and other information. You may also contact Jessica Cioffi at (714) 628-7377 or cioffi@chapman.edu.

Art and Writing Contest Criteria:

Prose/Poetry

- Must be submitted with cover sheet (available at <http://www.chapman.edu/holocausteducation>)
- Must be typed or word processed.
- Essay must be no more than **500** words in length. Word count **must** be noted.
- Poem must be no more than **30 lines**. Line count **must** be included at end.
- Must reflect genuine engagement with the survivor's testimony and constitute a thoughtful and creative response.

Art

- Must be submitted with cover sheet (available at <http://www.chapman.edu/holocausteducation/>)
- Must **not** be matted or framed.
- May only be two-dimensional and must not exceed 12" by 18".
- Must include fixatives so that works will not smudge or be altered by handling.
- Must include an artist's statement with: title of the work and a statement of no more than 100 words explaining how this work addresses the prompt and is an artistic "letter" to the survivor whose testimony the student has heard.
- May include photography, computer generated images, or may be in charcoal, pencil, watercolors, acrylics or oils. Please note that all images whether computer, artist or photo generated, must be original. Renderings of other works will be disqualified.

All entries become the property of the Sala and Aron Samueli Library at Chapman University. All artists are encouraged to retain a color copy of their work since the original will become the property of the Samueli Library. The Sala and Aron Samueli Holocaust Memorial Library shall own all the rights to all the entries, including copyrights and may display publish the entries in whole or in part.

Your school's three entries may be submitted beginning December 7, 2006 and **must be postmarked by February 7, 2007**. Prose and poetry entries may be mailed **or submitted electronically** to cioffi@chapman.edu. Artwork must be mailed to:

Ms. Jessica Cioffi
Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education
Chapman University
One University Drive
Orange, CA 92866

Each participating school will receive:

- 5 seats (availability permitting) at the awards ceremony on Friday, March 9, 2007 at Chapman University
- an opportunity for each entry in essay, poetry and art contest to win the first prize of \$500 and the second prize of \$250
- a copy of *The Holocaust Chronicle: A History in Words and Pictures* for every student representative in attendance
- certificates for the three student representatives from each school
- the opportunity to meet and talk with members of The "1939" Club, a Holocaust survivor organization
- additional prizes to schools, school representatives and finalists in attendance at awards ceremony