



# MCHEnews

MIDWEST CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION MAKING A DIFFERENCE SINCE 1993

SPRING/SUMMER | 2023

## I Witness Returns

### CONVERSATIONS WITH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

By Jessica Rockhold

The first time I walked into the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education, I arrived on the day of an I Witness program. On that day 350 school children were there to listen to Jack Mandelbaum share his story of Holocaust survival. Already gone were the days of survivors traveling the city visiting schools, but the schools were still able to come to the survivors.

For the next three years as I managed the I Witness program, I saw thousands of children learn from Jack, Bronia Roslawowski, Sonia Golad, Eugene Lebovitz, Ilsa Cole, Ida Loeffler and others. Students would fill the Social Hall to hear the story and then line up to shake the survivor's hand (or get a hug if it was Bronia).

The survivor speakers gave selflessly of themselves. Many described having nightmares in the days leading up to their scheduled speaking event as they contemplated their testimony, but they never cancelled. While the children were lined up eager to meet them or touch them – proof of the realness of the story they had just heard – the survivors stayed well past the time we had promised, never wanting to turn away a child on whom they could have an impact.

*Local survivor testimony is the bedrock upon which MCHE was built.*

When MCHE reached a point in 2006 where there were not enough survivors speaking to meet the incredible demand from the school community, we turned to their children – the Second Generation – to carry their parents' memories forward. The remaining survivor speakers expressed relief that their stories would

carry on and that the burden was no longer theirs alone to carry. For the past 17 years, the Second Generation has been the primary group speaking to school audiences with just a few survivors still speaking publicly and largely to adult audiences – notably Gitla Doppelt, Judy Jacobs, Tom Lewinsohn and Sonia Warshawski.

Local survivor testimony is the bedrock upon which MCHE was built. In honor of that legacy, we are pleased to present a very special 30th anniversary speaker series featuring a monthly conversation with a Holocaust survivor throughout 2023. Each month through November we will feature a conversation with a survivor exploring not only their experiences in the Holocaust, but visiting about their life before and after the war and their perspective on the world today.



Holocaust survivor Gitla Doppelt in 2019

**SURVIVOR SPEAKERS** will be scheduled based on their availability and announced in the days leading up to the presentation. In the event of illness or other unforeseen circumstances, we will make every effort to find an alternate speaker or to reschedule. We appreciate your understanding and consideration of our survivors.

**DATES:** April 18, May 8, June 6, July 11, August 22, September 12, October 3, and November 7

**TIME:** 6:30 p.m.

**PLACE:** Social Hall of the Jewish Community Campus, 5801 W. 115th Street, Overland Park, KS 66211

These events are free and open to the public. **Registration is required at [mchekc.org/iwitness](https://mchekc.org/iwitness).** Your support through memberships and donations in honor of our survivors are appreciated.

# Our 30th Anniversary: Reflecting on What Survivors Built

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE | JESSICA ROCKHOLD



In the spring of 1993, as *Schindler's List* was filming in Krakow, Poland, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was opening its

doors, our nation was on the cusp of a pivotal moment in Holocaust education. As had happened in the 1960s with the Eichmann Trial and the 1970s with the miniseries *Holocaust*, 1993 was a year when public consciousness focused on these historical events.

## A Pivotal Year

That same spring Jack Mandelbaum and Isak Federman realized their vision of establishing a center for Holocaust education in the Kansas City community and, in doing so, participated in a larger historical moment that saw the creation of Holocaust education centers across the country. Together these centers have played a major role in professionalizing and institutionalizing the field of Holocaust education in a way that ensures that this history is taught in perpetuity.

Jack and Isak were taking the next step in a journey that the broader Kansas City survivor community began very soon after the war. It was a community that

started to come together in the late 1940s as camp survivors made their way from the displaced persons camps and joined the German and Austrian survivors already in the United States. They found their footing as new Americans – learning the language, becoming citizens, establishing their careers and building their families.

## Ahead of Their Time

Having re-established those core elements of their lives in this new place, these Kansas City survivors proved to be pioneers in Holocaust memory and education. In addition to their personal and emotional connections, they institutionalized their relationships by founding the New American Club, which resulted in a very early adoption of *Yom Hashoah* in our community. They also commissioned the construction of the Memorial to the Six Million, which proved to be at the forefront of Holocaust memorialization in the United States. The New American Club archive tells us that from their very earliest days in Kansas City, our local survivor community was interested in ensuring Holocaust memory and education, even discussing a library or center decades before it came to fruition.

As MCHE marks its 30th anniversary with a year of profound programming, we reflect on the work accomplished and what



Jack Mandelbaum and Isak Federman with Jack Igielnik at the Memorial to the Six Million in April 1993.

is left to be done. We strive to be responsive to the world around us and to carefully and accurately apply the lessons of the Holocaust to the challenges of the day. We vow to meet our learners where they are – elevating the knowledge and understanding of those deeply invested in this history and continually reaching out to those who need to know and understand. And in all of our endeavors, we pledge to keep our survivors – both their testimonies and their intentions – at the heart of our work, continuing always to build on the foundation they laid.

## MCHE on YouTube

### CLOSED CAPTIONING TRANSCRIPTS IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY

MCHE's YouTube Channel receives hundreds of thousands of views each year. Its content includes hundreds of hours of survivor testimony, lectures by leading Holocaust scholars, and annual commemorative programming.

To improve the accessibility of this online content, MCHE has committed to providing

closed captioning transcripts for each program. All survivor testimonies have been captioned, while the remaining online content is being transcribed by our spring 2023 intern, Abigail Graham. A senior in American Studies and Environmental Resources at the University of Wyoming, Abigail said that she wanted to work for MCHE "to further the educational

reach of MCHE because Holocaust education is extremely important, especially in our current social climate."

To access this content, visit MCHE Kansas City on YouTube (@MCHEKansasCity). Join nearly 3,000 subscribers to be notified when new content posts.





My wife Beth and I recently completed a trip to nine countries in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. It was eye-opening! Prior to the trip, we thought of

ourselves as college-educated folks tuned into world events and different cultures. Abroad, we were surprised to confront our limited if not mistaken understanding of and generalizations about the people and cultures we visited.

We discussed that too many of our views of the regions in which we traveled were still shaped by what we learned in childhood. And we spoke frequently about how a lack of familiarity with the “other” is the soil in which intolerance, bigotry and hatred grow and how children learn through modeling.

### Engaging to Understand

To correct our understandings of the people and places we visited, we frequently engaged in cordial, longer conversations with locals, many conducted through limited English and Google Translate. We found that lack of familiarity was a two-way street. Beyond Hollywood icons, some famous brands and news headlines, people we met in the countries we visited also knew little about us — our country, life, practices, and certainly our religion and culture.

We managed to ask locals about their knowledge of Jews and particularly the Holocaust. In the second largest city in the world, Judaism is somewhat blankly acknowledged, but the Holocaust is not a familiar event. We also stopped to consider how little knowledge we had of the crimes of the Khmer Rouge or the persecution of the Uyghurs. When we factored that in

# The World Could Forget

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE | STEVEN E. COLE

with western educators' statistics that show knowledge of the Holocaust risks fading from memory in Europe and the United States, it unexpectedly made us sense that **the world could forget** the genocide that is the specter in the consciousness of all Jews. It emphasized for us the importance of the work of MCHE in the heartland of the USA.

What would it mean to travel in Kansas and Missouri and get muted, vacant expressions when talking about the Jews and the Holocaust? “Never Again” is the rallying cry of survivors and their descendants. However, left unaddressed through education, “again” can happen if few know and acknowledge what did occur.

### More People Need to Know

All of this ties directly into your Midwest Center for Holocaust Education. In our corner of the world, MCHE provides schools and community, government and military groups with the highest quality, accurate and absorbable lessons about the Holocaust. Doing so, MCHE works relentlessly to keep fresh and relevant what did and can happen when antisemitism, bigotry, and hatred creep into the common understanding.

**The mission of MCHE is to teach the history of the Holocaust, applying its lessons to counter indifference, intolerance, and genocide.** MCHE helps

suppress fear of the other, keeping the Holocaust relevant and in front of those whose own shallow understanding or ignorance of events of the Nazi era make them vulnerable to xenophobia and hatred.

MCHE does big things and does them right. In 2022 alone, even limited by the Covid environment, MCHE partnered with 24 organizations. Our school and educational programs were directly utilized by over 7,000 individuals. Our online reach exploded with 398,835 individuals accessing our programming online through our video library! Our team conducted multiple direct outreach interventions in response to antisemitic and racist incidents in our region. And our speakers bureau resumed making in-person presentations to schools — in November we spoke to our first full house since 2019 with more than 350 students attending our annual *Kristallnacht* panel.

Our impact is immense. Now we need to reach more people.

Supporting this impact is why we ask you to renew your own membership and help us by bringing your friends, relatives, and business/civic associates to our mission.

*Steve Cole was for 28 years President of Dedicated Distribution, Inc., a national medical equipment and supply wholesaler. The son of Holocaust survivors Walter and Ilsa Cole, Steve is a father of three, a Second Generation speaker for MCHE, and along with his wife, Beth, a volunteer at the JFS Food Pantry.*



Abigail Graham  
MCHE Spring 2023 Intern

**2022 TOP CONTENT** Our 2022 top content on YouTube featured all six MCHE documentaries in the Witnesses to the Holocaust series, as well as four presentations in the 20-part Auschwitz speaker series.

1. Witnesses to the Holocaust: Auschwitz
2. Witnesses to the Holocaust: In Hiding
3. Visualizing Genocide: The Auschwitz Album and the Process of Death, featuring Dr. Fran Sternberg
4. Witnesses to the Holocaust: *Kristallnacht*
5. Frozen Moments – What is Revealed in the Photographs of Auschwitz, featuring Paul Salmons
6. Witnesses to the Holocaust: The Ghettos
7. Witnesses to the Holocaust: Liberation and After
8. Witnesses to the Holocaust: Jewish Responses
9. Belzec to Auschwitz, featuring Dr. Shelly Cline
10. Archaeology of the Holocaust: Treblinka and Bergen-Belsen, featuring Dr. Caroline Sturdy Colls

# Auschwitz Legacy Fellows

## 2023 FELLOWS REPRESENT RURAL DISTRICTS

Last year, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation together with its institutional partner the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum launched the Auschwitz Legacy Fellowship, a year-long program for U.S. high school teachers. MCHE was proud to be one of the four local partners serving as an educational resource and supporting four regional educators in the inaugural class of the fellowship program.

We are pleased to announce our continued partnership with the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation in supporting two educators as 2023 Auschwitz Legacy Fellows. The Fellowship program works to equip teachers with the knowledge, language and instructional tools needed to effectively teach their students the lessons of the Holocaust through in-depth study at sites in Warsaw, Krakow and Auschwitz.

MCHE nominees to this year's class represent rural school districts in Kansas and Missouri. To qualify for the program, the nominees must teach the Holocaust in their high school classrooms and have never traveled to Auschwitz. Ashley and Elijah join 31 other educators from Michigan, California, Colorado, Utah and New York.

Generous financial support for the 2023 Fellows was provided by Bank of America.

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**AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU  
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION**

### *Ashley Young* *Smith-Cotton High School* *Sedalia, MO*

In my semester-long Holocaust course, I concentrate on the 12 years the Nazis were in control of Germany. The course ranged in scope from the beginnings of antisemitism in Europe and Hitler's early life in Vienna to Holocaust denial and modern incidents of antisemitism. Through the ABMF Fellows program, I am hoping to gain a deeper understanding of Auschwitz itself and the Holocaust as a whole. I am looking forward to returning with new ideas, knowledge, and inspiration to make my course better for my students.



### *Elijah Moore* *Pike Valley High School* *Scandia, KS*

I currently teach 9th to 12th grade English Language Arts in rural Kansas. Our sophomore class engages in a nine-week unit studying Elie Wiesel's *Night*. The aim of my lesson design is to help students develop a depth of understanding about the Holocaust and a framework that can be applied to the world around them to prevent further atrocities.

I am deeply honored to have been selected to participate in the Auschwitz Legacy Fellowship. My hope is to make connections with other educators to enhance my instruction and develop resources for myself and my students. I also feel that traveling to the locations we study in school will help me cement them in my students' minds as real places and deepen their connection to the experiences of Wiesel and those who lived through the Holocaust.



## Isak Federman Teaching Cadre

### GNOSHING AND STRATEGIZING

After a long pandemic hiatus, members of the Isak Federman Holocaust Teaching Cadre reunited in February. Sustained by good food, the group spent time catching up before conversation turned to the ways classroom instruction, instructional technology, and staff development have changed since Spring 2020. They discussed how these factors will affect MCHE's outreach to schools and educators.

Dr. Shelly Cline, MCHE's Director of Education, shared MCHE's goals to expand outreach to rural areas and serve the Midwest. The group discussed ways to achieve these goals, including expanding the Cadre to include those who live outside the Kansas City metro area and represent the diversity of our school communities.

Beginning in Fall 2023, the newly expanded Cadre, comprised of six returning members and six Auschwitz Legacy Fellows, will resume their role as MCHE's academic advisory committee.



Dianne O'Bryan, who has been a member of the cadre since its inception, and Dr. Shelly Cline.

# Yale Archive Now Available at MCHE

MCHE is pleased to announce our renewed partnership with the Yale Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies and our participation as an affiliate access site for the archive.

## About Fortunoff

The Fortunoff Archive, part of the Yale University Library, has its origins in a 1979 grassroots movement to record the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses who lived in New Haven, Connecticut. These testimonies were donated to Yale University and became the springboard for a collection that now boasts more than 4,400 testimonies contributed by 36 affiliates across the Americas, Europe and Israel.

In addition to a professional team of archivists and librarians, the Archive is served by distinguished Holocaust scholars who make up its Advisory Board, which is led by Yale historian Dr. Timothy Snyder.

## Affiliate Access Site

One of MCHE's first projects was the recording of survivor testimonies in 1994. MCHE became an official affiliate of Fortunoff, utilizing their interviewer training and methodology in the collection of the testimonies. The affiliation also provided a way to ensure preservation of the testimonies, a capacity that MCHE lacked. The testimonies have been housed at both MCHE and Fortunoff since that time.

Though digitization of MCHE's collection has been completed, the unedited testimonies of our local survivors have never been accessible online.

Through this partnership, researchers, families and interested individuals can now access the full interviews in a web-based format for the first time.



## Accessing the Archive

The Archive is only accessible onsite at Yale or an affiliate center. To access the archive at MCHE, contact MCHE historian Dr. Shelly Cline at [shellyc@mcchekc.org](mailto:shellyc@mcchekc.org) to schedule an appointment.

Yale

Fortunoff Video Archive  
For Holocaust Testimonies



The Fortunoff Video Archive and the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education have a long history of cooperation. Back in the early 1990s, MCHE recorded dozens of testimonies with survivors and witnesses in the Kansas City area in its role as an official affiliate of the Fortunoff

Archive. At the time, Fortunoff had affiliates all over the world. They were independent organizations, partners in a cooperative documentation effort. Fortunoff was the mother archive, but we couldn't have expanded our scope without the essential work of affiliates like MCHE. We are grateful for this cooperation, and it is incumbent upon the archive to bring the digital collection now back to the affiliates and their constituencies.

Furthermore, on a personal note, as someone who was born and raised in Kansas City, who went to Ohev Shalom and Hebrew High at the JCC, it means a lot to me to see this cooperation refreshed for the 21st century. I hope Jessica and the staff and educators at MCHE will benefit from access to this unique digital collection of which MCHE's 1994-recordings are an important component.

Stephen Naron, Director  
Fortunoff Archive

Save  
the  
Date

MONDAY JUNE 26, 2023 | 6:30 P.M.

## MCHE Annual Meeting and Elections

MCHE members are invited to submit nominations for the MCHE Board of Directors and Council of Advocates by emailing Nominating Committee Chair Karl Zobrist at [info@mcchekc.org](mailto:info@mcchekc.org). Register to attend at [mcchekc.org/annualmeeting](http://mcchekc.org/annualmeeting).



Please visit [mchekc.org/membership](https://mchekc.org/membership) to become a member, reactivate an expired membership, or to give a gift membership.

**LEGACY GIFTS** Make Holocaust education part of your enduring philanthropic legacy by including a gift to MCHE in your will, your trust or by beneficiary designation. Contact Jessica Rockhold at 913-327-8191 or [jessicar@mchekc.org](mailto:jessicar@mchekc.org) to become a legacy donor.

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## 2023 MEMBERSHIP CHALLENGE

This year MCHE celebrates 30 years of teaching the history and lessons of the Holocaust. With the rise of antisemitism, hate speech and racial tensions, the lessons of the Holocaust are more relevant than ever. It is critical that MCHE continue to teach about the consequences of unchallenged bigotry in the face of inaction, complacency and apathy.

In honor of its 30th anniversary, MCHE set a goal to double its membership to 800 members and raise \$300,000 in memberships, donations and sponsorships in support of our operations and educational outreach. To advance this goal, MCHE benefactors Karen and Mike Herman have announced the Herman Family Initiative — a challenge grant that matches the first \$50,000 brought in by new members through 2023 — DOUBLING YOUR IMPACT!

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#### EDUCATORS

Ethel Ardow  
Andrew Bergerson  
Christopher Bobal  
Tracy Cobden  
Maril Crabtree  
Mary Beth Craddock  
Angie DalBello  
Barbara Fisher  
Sharon Elbaum Glickman  
Angela Gottesburen  
Miriam Hipsh  
Suzy Katz  
Mark & Vicky Nanos  
Marlys Peck  
Jennifer Reeder  
Mike Russell  
Vicki Simmons  
Phyllis Smith  
Shannon Snapp  
Dale Urie  
Maureen Wilt  
Crystal Yakel-Kuntz

## BRINGING OTHERS TO THE CAUSE



Eliana, Noah and Danielle Schwartzbard held their 3rd annual MLK Day hot chocolate stand to raise funds to support MCHE. They are our youngest members and part of the White Rose Society. The children are pictured here with their parents Kaley Wajcman Schwartzbard and Jonathan Schwartzbard.



MCHE Board member Bill Tammeus celebrated his birthday with a cultivation event, inviting his family and friends to become involved in our programming and to become members. Pictured here is Bill with his granddaughters Ava, 9, and Scarlett, 6.



Second Generation member Fanny Mandelberger honored her mother, Eta, on what would have been Eta's 101st birthday by showing her mom's testimony and asking for support for Holocaust education in the form of donations to MCHE in addition to soliciting Facebook donations on her own birthday.



## SURVIVOR PROFILE

# Sonia Golad

Sonia Borowik, the daughter of Esther and Israel Borowik, grew up in Vilna, Poland, where she attended a private Jewish day school. In her free time, she ice-skated and skied, read Sholem Aleichem and I. L. Peretz, and wrote to a pen pal in New York. She fondly recalled long Sunday walks to visit family and friends in the suburbs and carefree summers with her siblings on a farm.

After experiencing the transfer of her community from Polish to Soviet to Lithuanian administration, Vilna was overtaken by the German invasion in 1941. In the Vilna Ghetto, Sonia and her family endured hardships and deprivation. They escaped early transports by hiding in a secret room behind a wardrobe. Eventually, she was deported to labor camps in Estonia, where she was forced to do difficult manual labor before being selected to work as a maid for the commandant.

While working for the commandant, she aided the escape of 41 fellow prisoners, including her sister, by relaying information from the commandant's office. She delayed the morning roll call, at great sacrifice to herself, by making mistakes that retained the commandant's attention and led to severe beatings.

Sonia was transferred to Stutthof and Neuengamme before being taken to Bergen-Belsen. While at Bergen-Belsen, Sonia was chosen as part of the Bernadotte transports, a humanitarian rescue operation organized by the Swedish Red Cross. After recovering her strength, she worked for various international agencies, screening Jewish children for immigration. In 1947, she emigrated to Chicago, where she met her husband, David Golad. They moved to Kansas City in 1951.

To access Sonia's testimony and to see a dance performance inspired by her testimony, visit [mchekc.org/testimonial/sonia-golad/](http://mchekc.org/testimonial/sonia-golad/). Professional educators and students can access her Shoah Foundation testimony through the USC Shoah Foundation iWitness program at [iwatch.usc.edu](http://iwatch.usc.edu).



Top: Sonia in 2000 photographed by David Sosland.  
Bottom: Sonia at an UNRAA event in Europe in 1946.

## Yom Hashoah Commemoration

### A KANSAS CITY COMMUNITY TRADITION

On April 19, 1943, the remaining Jews of the Warsaw ghetto launched their final act of armed resistance. For 27 days these ill-equipped Jewish fighters held out against the Germans. At least 7,000 died in the fighting, and 42,000 were deported following the ghetto's destruction. This year marks the 80th anniversary of what came to be known as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It was the largest and, symbolically, most important Jewish uprising during the war. It was also the first urban uprising in German-occupied Europe.

Years later, in 1951 the Israeli Knesset established *Yom Hashoah* as 27 Nisan, tied to the date of the uprising. Commemorating this act of resistance was deeply important to our own survivor community. They began a *Yom Hashoah* memorial service that we continue to this day and commissioned a memorial both to remember those they had lost and to celebrate the heroism of the

Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This year marks the 60th anniversary of the dedication of this memorial.

Our community *Yom Hashoah* service will take place on **April 16 at 1:30 p.m.** in The White Theatre at the Jewish Community Campus in Overland Park. It is chaired by Jonathan Jacobs, son of Holocaust survivor Judy Jacobs.

In reflecting on the importance of coming together as a community to remember the Holocaust, Jonathan said, "We remember the Shoah not only as a tribute to the millions in our families that were murdered, but also as a reminder to be vigilant that this never happens again. In less than 10 years, Nazis escalated their antisemitism from *Kristallnacht* to the systemic murder of Jews, but we recognize that many other groups were also vulnerable. Today we witness celebrities and politicians



Detail of the Memorial to the Six Million showing the map of the Warsaw Ghetto.

openly spewing distressing bigotry and people being murdered on the basis of religion, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation."

The *Yom Hashoah* commemoration is free and open to the public. Members of the community who are not able to attend in person are invited to watch the livestream event on MCHE's YouTube channel (MCHE Kansas City) beginning at 1:30 p.m. that day.



# The Holocaust in the East

## GHETTOS AND SHOOTING ACTIONS IN VILNIUS

By Shelly M. Cline, PhD

Although we are quick to associate the Holocaust with the gas chambers of its six killing centers, such a view excludes the experiences of those outside the camp system. By approaching the Holocaust with this limited view, we are missing the history of those in the East before the establishment of the “Final Solution.”

In September of 1939, Germany invaded Poland from the West and the Soviet Union swept in from the East. Poland was divided into three sections. The western-most would be incorporated directly into German territory and administered as a part of the Reich. The central portion, the *Generalgouvernement*, was administered as an occupied territory. The eastern portion was ceded to the Soviet Union and would be the first territory to be invaded by Nazi troops in June of 1941 under Operation Barbarossa.

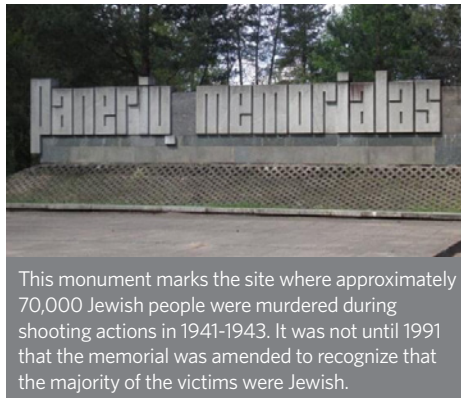
Two defining features of the Holocaust in the East are the Nazis’ use of ghettos and shooting actions. Vilnius, Lithuania, previously known as Vilna, is one location that saw both of these “situational solutions.”

### Changing Borders

Few cities in Europe have a more complicated history than Vilnius. During the 20th century, the city changed hands at least 12 times, sometimes multiple times within the course of a single year. Following World War I, the city was incorporated into the newly formed nation of Poland.



The forest of Ponary was once a popular picnic area. In 1940 the Soviets dug pits to store airplane fuel. Beginning in 1941 the Nazis used these pits as an execution and burial site for approximately 100,000 people.



This monument marks the site where approximately 70,000 Jewish people were murdered during shooting actions in 1941-1943. It was not until 1991 that the memorial was amended to recognize that the majority of the victims were Jewish.

After the Nazi invasion of 1939, the city was in the territory administered by the Soviets as a Lithuanian puppet state until summer 1941.

In June of 1941, the German army invaded and occupied the city. By July 1941, Vilna was subjugated to German military rule and mass murder of the Jews of Vilna began. In partnership with the Lithuanians, a unit of the *Einsatzgruppen* began shooting Jews in the nearby forest of Ponary. By the end of the German occupation, between 70,000 and 100,000 would be shot there.

### Culture and Resistance

While shooting actions were taking place, the Nazis established the Vilna ghetto in two parts. Approximately 30,000 Jews were forced into the larger ghetto, known as Ghetto I, where they would be subjected to forced labor. Another 11,000 Jews considered incapable of work were sent to Ghetto II. By October 1941, Ghetto II had been liquidated in shooting actions at Ponary. What followed was a time of relative stability as active murder operations were temporarily halted. During this time, those surviving Jews in the ghetto attempted to move forward with their lives. Under difficult conditions they organized schools and social service support, theater productions, sporting events, and maintained an active library.

Vilna had been an important center of Jewish cultural life before the war, and those who remained continued this tradition. In addition to these forms of spiritual and cultural resistance, Vilna had active underground movements dedicated to armed resistance. Ahead of the ghetto’s liquidation, these fighters escaped into

the forests through the sewer system. Some of those who remained were shot at Ponary, some were deported to killing centers, and still others were sent to concentration and labor camps in Estonia and Latvia.

### Jerusalem of Lithuania

Once known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, Vilna was the European center of Yiddish culture before the Holocaust. Like many Jewish communities in the East, over 90 percent of Vilna’s Jewish population was murdered in the Holocaust. Once a city with over 100 synagogues, today only one remains. Twenty-first century Vilnius is slowly coming to terms with its Holocaust past and beginning to commemorate this loss.

In 1991 the memorial at Ponary was changed to recognize the Jewish victims of the shootings there. And most notably the former ghetto library has recently been given to the Jewish community of Vilnius and granted historical protected status. It will eventually house a museum dedicated to the history of the Vilna ghetto and the Holocaust in Lithuania.

Vilna is a complex location where the western and eastern experiences of the Holocaust meet. A study of Vilna allows us to consider the varied experiences of the Holocaust and the equally varied responses of the people caught in this historical moment.

To learn more about Vilna, watch our recent historical presentation *Vilna and Jewish Resistance in the East* available on the MCHE YouTube channel.



Before WWII there were over 100 synagogues in Vilna. Today only the Choral Synagogue of Vilnius remains.

# Meet MCHE's Professional Team



Dana Smith  
Accounts Manager

**Dana originally joined the MCHE team** as a temp placement in 2006 at the peak of the spring busy season. We vividly recall her opening the drawer with deposits and finding a months-long backlog of accounting. Unfazed by the challenge, Dana dove in with her characteristic work ethic and will to figure it out and make it work. Dana has rebuilt our processes into a modern, digital system, which has made us quick, efficient and transparent in a way that has helped us achieve our Platinum GuideStar rating and sail through annual audits.

Dana is the only member of the team who did not come to MCHE because of the content. She can apply her skills anywhere. She chooses to be here because she became invested in the mission, in the people, and in our team. On a small team with very fluid job descriptions, Dana is often the person we call on to trouble shoot the technology and stay on hold with the online support call. She's the person who can always find what we need on a moment's notice.

Dana is a John Wayne aficionado, really enjoys a good salad, and maybe most importantly, is the one that when the job seems a little too heavy, or we get a little too dark, is there with the levity we need to bring us back.



Dr. Shelly Cline  
Historian and Director of Education

**Shelly joined the MCHE team** as our historian in March 2015, just months after finishing her Ph.D. in Modern European History at the University of Kansas. Already an award-winning educator, Shelly took responsibility for MCHE's commemorative and adult programming. In 2020, when she also became the Director of Education, she assumed responsibility for MCHE's increasingly diverse and expansive programming, now offered both in-person and digitally.

Shelly was instrumental in the curation and delivery of the much-heralded 20-part Auschwitz speaker series, which featured many of the most prominent historians in the field. She also teaches extensively for MCHE, reaching audiences of students, educators and adult learners — especially her very loyal lunch and learners. Her ability to do the intellectual work of program development and teaching separates MCHE from many centers our size, many of which outsource this work.

Shelly is a foodie with a small but complete barista setup in the back room. If you happen to be in the office, she is going to offer you a coffee — but by that she means a double shot espresso with foam. And aside from being a qualified historian, her liberal arts education makes her an excellent trivia partner. The combined package makes Shelly your ideal party guest.



Laura Patton  
Program Associate

**Laura is MCHE's newest employee**, having joined the team in October 2022. Though new to public history, Laura is an experienced educator, coming to us after a full career as a classroom teacher in the Shawnee Mission School District. During that time, she taught her students the Holocaust through English Language Arts units and was a 20-year veteran of the Isak Federman Teaching Cadre where she specialized in helping other educators adapt Holocaust education to the middle school level and in selecting appropriate memoirs and reading material for the age group.

As MCHE's Program Associate, Laura is tasked with rebuilding MCHE's connections to educators, which were affected by the mass migration and resignation of teachers during the pandemic, and with expanding our network of rural and regional educators. She is also working to write new teaching materials for classroom educators and to expand our White Rose Student Research Contest throughout the Midwest.

Laura is a whole vibe. She wants to know you and what motivates you. There is no superficial conversation with Laura. When she started at MCHE she fully moved in, complete with lamps. Her office feels like a place you want to sit down and have a chat — and she has treats.



In marking our 30th anniversary, we invite you to get to know the people that do this important work. Though small in number, they produce incredible programming in terms of both quality and quantity, well beyond the scope of most centers of MCHE's size. Their combined 56 years of service to MCHE speaks to their commitment to the mission and their bond as a team.

**This year Jessica marks 20 years at MCHE**, having joined the team in 2003 immediately after completing her graduate degree and year as a research assistant to the Senior Historian at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

For 17 years Jessica managed our programs for students and educators, serving first as the School Outreach Coordinator, then as the Director of Education, and finally as the Associate Director. In her time at MCHE, she has been instrumental in creating and developing the Witnesses to the Holocaust Archive and online access to survivor testimonies, the Second Generation Speakers Bureau, and in developing and teaching the professional education programs for which MCHE is known.

In 2020 Jessica was named Executive Director. Under her stewardship MCHE modernized and adapted to the challenges of remote learning and digital administration presented by the pandemic and laid out a strategic vision for MCHE's next decade of regional growth and impactful programming.

Aside from being a content specialist, Jessica has a near encyclopedic knowledge of our local survivor testimonies. Her connection to the survivors and many of their family members has informed the way she teaches and her vision for MCHE. Most of Jessica's best ideas come in the middle of the night. Her work is fueled directly by Dr. Pepper and frappuccinos and must be conducted in very organized surroundings on a clean desktop.



Jessica Rockhold  
Executive Director

**Ronda has been MCHE's librarian since 2013** when she joined our team while still serving as a school librarian in the Blue Valley School District and as a member of the Isak Federman Holocaust Teaching Cadre. Ronda undertook the daunting task of modernizing and professionalizing the MCHE library — fully reshelving the books by Library of Congress number and keyword coding the full collection in our library software for easy access by the public.

Having retired from the school district several years ago, Ronda remained a valued member of the MCHE team. Now, after 10 years, she is retiring from her role at MCHE, though she remains deeply invested in Holocaust education through her support of MCHE and in her role as an administrative assistant and docent at the Lowell Milken Center for Unsung Heroes in Fort Scott, where she makes her home in a haunted house she recently had placed on the historic register.



Ronda Hassig  
Librarian



*"Here's to 30 more years!"*



# Investigating Genocides

WORKSHOPS AIM TO UNDERSTAND PATTERNS OF HUMAN VIOLENCE

As the first reports of the mass murder of Europe's Jews made it to the newspaper pages of the western media, there was no specific word to name this crime. The word "genocide" was first coined by Polish lawyer Raphaël Lemkin in 1944, not only to describe what was happening to the Jews of Europe, but also to describe previous crimes against targeted groups. In this way we can understand the Holocaust in the context of a pattern of human violence. Genocides occurred before the Holocaust and they continue to today.

While it is never appropriate to compare

suffering, comparison of policy and implementation can be a useful tool to better understand genocide. The act of comparison helps us predict outcomes and aids in intervention and eventual prosecution.

Appropriate projects of comparison must be factually accurate and address both similarities and differences. We have an ethical obligation to discredit fascism and a legal obligation to prosecute genocide. Comparison forces us to recognize the scope and scale of mass atrocities throughout modern world history, as well as our repeated failures to prevent or impede them.

## UMKC Partnership

In May, MCHE and the University of Missouri-Kansas City will again partner to present workshops called *Investigating Genocides*. UMKC graduate students enrolled in Dr. Andrew Bergerson's comparative genocide course are investigating a variety of topics, from mass killings in Indonesia to systemic racism in the United States to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, utilizing the lens of the Holocaust to evaluate commonalities and differences. These student-led workshops are a joint program of MCHE and the UMKC History Department.

Professor Bergerson reminds us, "At stake in these presentations are not just the question of comparative genocides but also piecing out, in a careful and scholarly manner, the definitions of the term genocide, as well as the consequences of those definitions for politics and ethics."

*Investigating Genocides* workshops are free and open to the public. Registration information and specific content descriptions will be posted in April at [mchekc.org](http://mchekc.org).



## Surviving Hitler

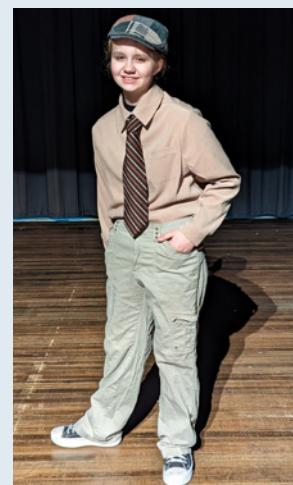
In February, Pioneer Ridge Middle School in Gardner, Kansas, staged a production of *Surviving Hitler*. This play by Andrea Warren based on the life of Holocaust survivor Jack Mandelbaum was first staged at The White Theatre last year.

The play, based on a book of the same name, tells the story of Jack's childhood experiences in the Holocaust and shares his current reflections on founding the Midwest Center for Holocaust Education.

"It was a complex challenge for the kids and the director, and I was amazed at how well they pulled it off."

— Andrea Warren

School or community groups interested in staging a production can find complete details at [andreawarren.com](http://andreawarren.com).





# SPRING/SUMMER PROGRAM CALENDAR

Please visit [mchekc.org](http://mchekc.org) for complete details and to register for programs.

## APRIL



### April 16

Annual Yom Hashoah Commemoration – 1:30 p.m.

### April 18

State of Kansas Holocaust Commemoration – 1:00 p.m. in Topeka, KS

I Witness: Conversations with Survivors – 6:30 p.m.

### April 25

Remembering the Past, Beginning Anew: Holocaust Survivors' Journey in Kansas City – 6:00 p.m. at the Johnson County Museum



## April 25

Holocaust Distortion and Denial – 6:00 p.m. at the Hays Public Library in Hays, KS

## MAY

### May 1

MCHE Academic Awards Ceremony

### May 3

Investigating Genocide Workshops with UMKC – 6:30 p.m. on Zoom

### May 8

I Witness: Conversations with Survivors

### May 9

Universal Crime, Individual Experience: Perspectives from Children of Survivors – 6:00 p.m. at the Independence Branch of the Mid-Continent Library



## JUNE

### June 6

I Witness: Conversations with Survivors

### June 22

Operation Barbarossa Commemoration

### June 26

Annual Meeting and Elections – 6:30 p.m.

## JULY

### July 11

I Witness: Conversations with Survivors

### July 17-18

KC to DC Educator Program

## AUGUST

### August 22

I Witness: Conversations with Survivors

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\* of blessed memory

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*The mission of MCHE is to  
teach the history of the Holocaust,  
applying its lessons to counter indifference,  
intolerance, and genocide.*