

NEWS

WINNIPEG

Screening, book launch a moving Holocaust event



Authors Felix Opatowski (left), Judy Abrams and Max Bornstein launched their personal Holocaust accounts at a book launch and film screening sponsored by B'nai Brith Canada and the Azrieli Foundation in Winnipeg. (Photos: Rebeca Kuropatwa)

Rebeca Kuropatwa
PRAIRIES
CORRESPONDENT

Three authors launched their personal Holocaust accounts at a moving evening event last week at McNally Robinson Booksellers.

B'nai Brith Canada partnered with the Azrieli Foundation for this program, *Azrieli Series of Holocaust Survivor Memoirs – Book Launch and Film Screening*, with some 50 attendees. Following the short films and discussion was a Q&A session, followed by a book signing.

Judy Abrams' book is *Tenuous Threads*, Max Bornstein's book is *If Home Is Not Here*, and Felix Opatowski's book is *Gatehouse to Hell* – all of which have been published by The Azrieli Foundation.

Abrams, who was born in Budapest writes evocatively of her time as a hidden child, separated from her parents and forced to pass as Christian.

"I walked with my mother on a beautiful sunny day in April, and she left me at the gate of a convent.... New documents made me into a Catholic child.... I thought only of the present.... I became someone else," said Abrams.

"I was brought up not to hate. There are so many instances of children being damaged by wartime and hatred. Inside myself I've not har-

boured any hatred, but the Hungarians have never done anything to reconcile their role in the Holocaust, unlike the Germans."

Bornstein lived in Winnipeg for 10 years of his childhood before being swept back into the maelstrom of Europe under Nazi threat and occupation.

"In Aug 1940, the third month of the German occupation, I thought up the new

plan to escape into the free zone," said Bornstein. "After numerous attempts, I finally escaped and made it to Marseilles where I worked with a refugee organization."

Born in Lodz, Poland, Felix Opatowski narrowly survived the horrors of Auschwitz and his participation in the camp underground.

"We arrived in Auschwitz," said Opatowski. "I thought to myself, after all the misery I'd

been through in the labour camp these past two years, this is my end...[but] it was not my time to die.

"You can't explain what hunger is.... You can't fall sleep at night being so hungry.... When I go to bed, I close my eyes and I'm in Auschwitz.... When I talk to you about this, I do it with my whole body, heart and soul, for my mother, my brother and for my father."

Of the Azrieli Foundation's

Holocaust Survivor Memoirs Program, which has, so far, published 21 survivor books/memoirs, survivor and philanthropist David Azrieli said, "In telling these stories, the writers have liberated themselves.... These unique historical documents put a face on what was lost and allow readers to grasp the enormity of what happened to six million Jews – one story at a time."

Alan Yusim, Director Midwest Region, B'nai Brith Canada, said, "The Holocaust and the results of the Nazi policies of genocide must be kept alive. The Holocaust memoirs published in the Azrieli series bring life to the dead, hope to the living and memory for those murdered.

"B'nai Brith is delighted to have partnered with the Azrieli Foundation on this...initiative."

WASHINGTON, DC

BBYO launches gap year Israel experience

Committed to providing more Jewish teens with more meaningful Jewish experiences, BBYO has launched a new pre-college, gap year program in Israel, Beyond (www.beyondyear.org).

The program brings together four significant partners, including Authentic Israel, Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, Masa Israel Journey, and Tel Aviv University to offer a powerful academic experience, along with service opportunities, leadership programming and travel. Beyond is BBYO's first gap year offering amongst its fast growing menu of Israel experiences offered under its Passport brand.

"Knowing the impact of a gap year experience in Israel, we feel compelled to leverage our expertise and experience in providing powerful Israel

experiences to increase the number of young Jews engaging in long-term study in Israel," said Matthew Grossman, BBYO executive director. "Our teens have requested a gap year experience, Israeli and North American Jewish leaders have called for more of these programs and we feel uniquely capable of delivering something scalable and life changing."

Beyond applicants can choose between a five-month and nine-month experience, both of which are eligible for an automatic Masa scholarship of \$1,000, with up to \$3,000 more being available based on financial need. With Tel Aviv University serving as the program's home base, participants have additional opportunities to explore Europe, engage in community service in Africa,

and develop new skills like scuba diving and cooking.

Beyond should attract Jewish young adults from all backgrounds and from all over the world (including Canada). Everyone can participate – BBYO membership is not required.

"Programs like Beyond prepare students to thrive in a competitive university setting and shape their worldview in a way that gives meaningful context to their academic studies" said Dr. Larry Moneta, vice-president for student affairs, Duke University.

"We know that teens who participate in BBYO programs are much more likely than their peers to seek out positions of leadership and contribute to the world around them. We are pleased to partner in the program and wel-

come them to our dynamic campus," said Pnina Gadai Agencyahu, director of Hillel at Tel Aviv University. "Being in Israel and Tel Aviv specifically offers the unique learning ex-

periences of an environment that is both ancient and modern – where Biblical archeology and microchip development are part of the fabric of daily life."

JERUSALEM

September sees record number of tourists in Israel

A record 306,000 tourists and visitors entered Israel in September, an all-time high for the month, according to a Central Bureau of Statistics report issued last week. The report said 8 per cent more visitors had come to Israel in September than in the same month last year, and 13 per cent more than in September 2010. The bureau recorded 70,000 one-day visits, a 28 per cent increase from last year, of which 33,000 were cruise ship vacationers visiting for the day. Ben-Gurion International Airport noted a 6 per cent increase in travellers in September as well, with 1.226 million travellers passing through the airport last month. The Israeli Airports Authority said there had been a 1.7 per cent increase in departures and arrivals compared with September 2011.