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## A Work in Progress

*Margot Stern Strom*

We are all shaped fundamentally by the conditions of our birth, our neighborhoods, by the groups we are a part of, by the virtue of our birth

—Hannah Arendt

The shadowy figures that look out at us from the tarnished mirror of history are—in the final analysis—ourselves

—Detlev J. K. Peukert

### GROWING UP IN MEMPHIS

I grew up in Memphis, Tennessee, at a time when separate never meant equal. I grew up in a city where “colored” water fountains did not spout brightly colored water as a child might expect, but stood as symbols of the dogmas of racism which defined indignity, shame, and humiliation for some and false pride and authority for others, practices which reflected centuries of unchallenged myth and hate. I grew up in a city where “colored day” at the zoo was Thursday, the only day African American children could visit, and where their library housed discarded books from our library. I grew up in a place where there was a rear entrance to the movies—if entrance was allowed at all—to a “colored seat” in the theater balcony. I grew up knowing there would always be empty seats on the bus for young white girls while those with a darker skin color would be crowded into the back. It was in Memphis where simple childhood notions of logic and fairness were shattered.

As a young child I often shopped at the department store downtown, Goldsmiths. I can remember seeing two sets of steps, worn and wooden, each leading to a water fountain. I wondered which water fountain to drink from. Later, when I could read the signs, one sign said “colored,” the other, “white.” As a child, I wanted to choose the one marked “colored” expecting a rainbow the colors of my crayon box. But I also remember, as if a hand had been laid on my shoulder, that I knew not to go to the “colored water fountain.” People of my skin color, my shading, drank from the water fountain marked “white.”

I don’t remember any adult “teaching the cruel rules of racism.” Yet, many of the adults I encountered reinforced that knowledge. I still recall the day a police officer pulled my car over to the side of the road to explain why I should not be sitting beside a “colored man”—even though he was someone I had known all my life. He worked for my parents and I had been riding beside him for as long as I could remember, but he was suspect now that I was an adolescent. I felt my friend’s shame, humiliation, and anger as the officer self-righteously walked away from the car.

As an adult, I am drawn to childhood stories of bigotry and hate. How are children impacted as a result of witnessing or experiencing hatred? Do they become indifferent, cynical, or apathetic in response to the contradictions of the adult world, or do they choose to become actively engaged in the world in reaction to the injustice? What marks the difference? What kind of education prepares children to confront the confusions and choose to participate in a democracy?

In the late 1970s, I came upon a letter to the editor of *The New York Times*. The author was a German who, like me, was born during World War II. He described his sense of shame in “belonging to an age” in which Nazi atrocities could take place:

How could I trust my parents, who balancing me on their knees sang “Deutschland, Deutschland, Uber Allies” with me? Who would make me call after a man in the street, a man I didn’t even know, “Jew! Jew!” Who, with my father—once a high-ranking officer—would tell me they had never, never heard of the camps? And who, when I asked him about the six million Jews that had been put to death, insisted it was 4.5 million. The figure I had quoted, he said, had been made up by the notoriously deceitful Jewish media—4.5 million, when my heart was counting one and one and one? [How could I] trust my teachers who taught me nine years of Latin, six years of Greek, two years of English philosophy, science and fine arts and yet were so clumsy at the fine art of teaching history? (n.d., n.p.)

In school my teachers carefully avoided any mention of “colored water fountains,” seating arrangements on city buses, and other manifestations of Jim Crow. There was a powerful silence about race and racism and no men-

tion of antisemitism or the Holocaust. “Bad history” was best forgotten. The Civil War was the War Between the States and we were taught how the South won the major battles. In my Tennessee history class I did not learn who lost the Civil War.

I look back at my teachers and wonder: Was there a conspiracy of silence? Surely all of my teachers were not racists. Were their voices stifled? If so, who silenced them? No one could teach about evolution. Did anyone resist? Did anyone try to alter the curriculum? Move from lecture to conversation? Connect history to ethics? Teach scientific understandings that would have challenged the myths and misinformation that legitimized racism? Maybe they tried to open our worlds in their way. Or maybe the political and social environment stifled such efforts. Who influenced my development and readied me to learn and teach about injustices?

I will never know the answers to these questions. I only know that my teachers did not trust us with the complexities of history—the dogmas were more secure, more comfortable. My classmates and I were betrayed by that silence. We should have been trusted to examine real history and its legacies of prejudice and discrimination and of resilience and courage.

What my teachers neglected or elected not to teach me, I learned at home. My parents, Fan and Lloyd, both employed in their furniture business, “worked” as citizens and teachers in the best sense of philosopher Hannah Arendt’s notion that we have two types of work: the industry of our labor and the activity of our citizenry. My parents taught me the meaning of social justice, the importance of political participation, and the value of faith. My real education was family-centered, and the lessons learned there nurtured my development and gave meaning to my life’s work, teaching. That explains in large part why I trace the adult developmental model, so central to my work, to my family, to my home.

My parents were models for their children as parents who believed in the nurturing of the head and heart of their children. They believed in education and were patient with my development. They were teachers, too. They educated us in all the subtle and not so subtle ways to love learning, to care for others, and to believe deeply in social justice.

My mother taught Sunday School. She was also a leader of a Great Books course and she expected me to attend some of her sessions. There I saw adults who did not know one another come together to form a community of learners and to discuss the ethical, political and moral implications of a piece of literature. Although I was too young to discuss St. Augustine’s work or Plato, I remember the conversation, the discourse, and debate.

Through her Great Books course, my mother brought together strangers—men and women—whose only connection was their love of ideas. After a hard day’s work, they discussed such authors as Aristotle with enthusiasm. They

discussed ideas like democracy, truth, and virtue and then connected those lofty ideas to their own lives.

My mother prepared for her Great Books course in the library of our Memphis home. There, too, she met with priests from nearby Christian Brothers College to exchange ideas for improving life in Memphis. As I listened to their conversations, I began to understand the importance of reaching out to those outside our immediate family, neighborhood, and religion. Their presence, however, did not always correct all the misunderstandings I had about religion.

As a child, I heard from my peers—other students, or maybe a cousin—that if a Jew entered a church and walked straight toward the cross they would be in trouble, maybe, I thought, damned. I did not know better. Recently, I was reminded of such myths and misinformation when I heard author Cynthia Ozick speak about her childhood memories of the Catholic churches in her neighborhood in response to a talk by James Carroll, author of *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*. Ozick said:

Fear and revulsion—that is what a church building once signified to me. A church was a dangerous threat; it stood for assault and murder. I grew up and went to public school in a pleasant neighborhood in the Northeast Bronx in the 1930s. A time when Father Coughlin, a fascist radio priest, broadcast antisemitic hatred every Sunday night and when Germany's malevolent aggressions against its Jewish citizens were gaining force. And when children, coming out of church—seeing me running—would throw stones and scream "Christ-killer." (C-SPAN Archives, *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews*, 1/10/2001)

That same lack of information—myths and misinformation—also influenced my husband Terry's life. His memories of being called "Christ-killer" by his Polish Catholic neighbors and classmates affected his view of the church and explains his passion for reading about early church history and the history of all religions.

One Jewish cheerleader at a time was the custom on our high school squad. When my sister Paula competed, we heard that had she not been Jewish she would have been chosen. We had Jewish high school sororities and one Jew a year was chosen as an honorary member of a Christian sorority. We all lived by these rules. I did not question them.

I would not begin to learn the history of the Christian roots of antisemitism and its legacies until I met Father Robert Bullock, pastor at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in Sharon, Massachusetts, at the first conference I attended on the Holocaust in 1974. He helped me to build upon the goodwill that I had encountered with my mother's friends at Christian Brothers College in Memphis. He helped me confront the ancient hatreds and myths that fueled the antisemitism that dictated that my childhood could be separated not only by the segregation of black and white, but also by Jew and non-Jew.

Today, Father Bullock is my mentor and friend, and one of my most significant teachers. His faith, his practice, and his loyalty have been a constant presence as he challenges my personal beliefs and instructs my family. I could not have dedicated my life to confronting the history of the Holocaust without him. Indeed, there would be no Facing History and Ourselves (the educational organization I cofounded and now direct that deals with education about the ill effects of intolerance, the Holocaust, and other critical issues) without him. Recently, an international fellowship was named in his honor at Facing History in recognition of his teaching about historical anti-Judaism, and antisemitism and the Holocaust.

My mother brought priests, poets such as Randall Jarrell, lectures on Shakespeare, and books from college into our home. My dad, an author and an artist, clipped and saved articles about people and topics that would inspire his children. He gardened, made scrapbooks about successful women in all professions, took us to the theatre, and to Temple, and built blue and white peppermint-striped track hurdles so my sister and I could practice for track. My sister Paula, brother Gerald, and I were deeply influenced by the attention and expectations our parents had for us.

My brother and sister were also role models. In the early 1960s, my brother was a lawyer in the civil rights division of the U.S. Department of Justice. When he tried to register African American voters in Mississippi, my parents received phone calls from relatives who wanted to know why a white southerner and a Jew was stirring up “trouble.” My parents received a number of anonymous letters, one declared that my brother was part of a Jewish-Communist conspiracy and warned of his impending death. According to the letter, when he died his body would have to be cremated, for if he were buried intact, he would contaminate the earth. Hate had invaded our home.

My parents’ belief in me, the words and actions of the principal who first hired me, the students who taught me, the scholars who educated me, the colleagues who worked with me have all influenced what has become a Facing History family. The labor-intensive model of reaching out to each and every teacher we meet is based on the belief that each person is capable of developing his/her capacity to think and act in a way that makes a better world. Together in a community of learners and teachers we focus on our everyday choices and the role we have in preserving and strengthening democracy. For I have learned that democracy is a work in progress—one that is shaped by the choices ordinary people make about themselves and others in their community and their nation. Although these choices may not seem important at the time, little by little they define an individual, create a community, and ultimately forge a nation. Such choices build on the precedent of those before us and leave a legacy for the next generation.

In our library at home, my parents also worked on political campaigns for candidates who rarely won. And it was in that library that my mother reached

for a prayer book the night before she went into the hospital for a biopsy that would determine her future. When I asked her why, she answered simply, "My faith gives me solace; it gives me courage."

The shelves in our library were stacked with books, magazines, and newspapers, including back issues of the Sunday edition of *The New York Times* book review section, which didn't arrive in Memphis until Tuesday. My parents were always underlining passages in articles to punctuate moral lessons, stimulate ideas, provoke debate, or illustrate a point. Many readings were handed to the nearest child, while others were earmarked for the one in need of a particular reminder or lesson. Sometimes my father delivered them to us along with an ice cream sundae or freshly popped popcorn and a coke float. At other times, he brought them to our bedside when he came to say goodnight. I can still recall the evening my father brought me a copy of the *New Yorker* opened to a story about a team of American doctors who had recently performed reconstructive surgery on the so-called Hiroshima maidens, young Japanese women who had been horribly disfigured by radiation from the atomic bombs the United States dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.

## TURNING POINTS

When I became a teacher in the Skokie, Illinois, school system in 1964, I knew that I did not want to be another link in a conspiracy of silence. I wanted to honor my students' potential to confront history in all of its complexity, to cope, and to make a positive difference in their school, community, nation, and the world. I quickly discovered that although I was officially the teacher, I was learning about adolescents and myself from my students.

In 1970 my husband, Terry, son, Adam, and I moved to Brookline, Massachusetts, and I began teaching eighth grade language arts and social studies at the John D. Runkle School in Brookline.

In the fall of 1975, I enrolled in the moral development program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The lessons I learned about cognitive and psychological development fueled my commitment to teach in ways that would respect my students' insights and challenge their best responses.

The following spring, Bill Parsons, a fellow teacher, and I attended our first workshop on the Holocaust at the request of the superintendent of the Brookline Public Schools, Dr. Robert Sperber, and of the Director of Social Studies, Dr. Henry Zabierek. Dr. Zabierek remembers the beginning of Facing History this way:

What is now known as "Facing History and Ourselves" had simple beginnings. Its origin can be traced to Max Laufer, a retired dentist in Brookline. He came to

Brookline Superintendent Bob Sperber and asked if we taught the Holocaust in our history curriculum.

Subsequently, Sperber and I hosted a series of meetings in the School Committee Room that included mostly religious and educational types. The main focus was on whether or not the Holocaust should be taught.

Eventually, the nays had it, since no other school system joined us in the teaching of the topic. Every excuse or roadblock was placed in the way: It's too messy. Why dredge this stuff up? It'll give kids nightmares. It's Jewish history and we don't have many Jews. We ought to "get back to the basics."

[Still,] Sperber and I decided that we should hold a conference so that everyone could learn more about the topic. We had teachers with master's degrees in history who knew little or nothing about the topic. We were determined not to hold the conference at [near-by] Brandeis [University] or any other venue with Jewish roots. To us, the topic was a human problem, not a Jewish one.

Our first conference was held at Bentley College. I believe it was in the fall of 1974. I invited all of the 7–12 social studies teachers in Brookline, 32 in number, to attend. Three came forth; Jim Dudley at Brookline High School, Margot Strom of Runkle School and Bill Parsons at Lincoln School.

The idea of teaching the Holocaust also came to us at an opportune time. These teachers were grappling with moral issues in their classes and had recently worked with Larry Kohlberg and his moral education denizens at Harvard. Moral dilemmas related to our curriculum had been written. The Holocaust provided the ultimate moral dilemma.

The conference was sponsored by Marty Goldman of the New England Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and others. Marty showed films and described the materials available through the ADL. Professor Lawrence Fuchs, of Brandeis University, a teacher whose commitment to education about justice is a model to us all, spoke about the universal moral questions involved in a study of the Holocaust. He recast the ethical questions that involved obligation, responsibility, and loyalty in light of the Holocaust. Professor Eric Goldhagen of Harvard University described a process of dehumanization perpetrated during the Holocaust that stunned me. Father Bullock spoke about the Gospels and the history of antisemitism and anti-Judaism—a history of which I was almost totally ignorant. I turned to Bill Parsons at the break and we discovered that although we both held graduate degrees in history, we had been students who were victims of the silence on the Holocaust. And now, as teachers, we were perpetuating that silence.

My "dis-ease" intensified when we were given a copy of a letter that a principal sent to his teachers on the first day of school each year:

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 more 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. (Ginott, 1972, p. 317)

The letter provided me with the impetus and the rationale to teach my own students what my teachers had failed to teach me—that history is largely the result of human decisions, that prevention of injustice is possible, and that education must have a moral component to make a difference. I wondered how I could have been teaching a curriculum about history, justice, law, civic responsibility, racism, and human behavior without a consideration of the Holocaust. I knew that I had to teach this history. But first I had to confront history and myself.

In the summer of 1974, with a grant from the Brookline Public Schools and the Danforth Foundation, Bill and I developed lessons on the Holocaust. Later, Dr. Zabierek prepared material on the history of World War I and World War II for the early resource book we titled *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. Meanwhile, Bill's father, Reverend Spencer Parsons, responded to our questions as we proceeded to dig deeper into the Christian roots of antisemitism. The lessons reflected our need not only to teach about the events that led to the Holocaust—but also engage adolescents in an educational process that honored both “head and heart”—one that held students' interest and enlarged their thinking through content with a moral dimension. We wanted to create a program that would link a particular history to universal questions, those timely yet timeless questions, that resonate with every generation.

## OTHER INFLUENCES

Adult development is not an abstract idea for me. It is part of the fabric of my personal and professional life. I am always searching for new ideas, new variations for the theme of Facing History and Ourselves. I learn not only from the people around me but also from the teachers (“virtual teachers”) I discover in books and films.

Indeed, many of the fundamental concerns to Facing History and Ourselves are those described in the works of the philosopher Hannah Arendt. When I learned that Arendt traced her impulse to “think about thinking” to the trial of Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann (head of Bureau IV B 4 in charge of the deportation and extermination of Jews), I was intrigued. There, instead of ideological conviction, evil motives, or ignorance, she found thoughtlessness. Eichmann



was protected from thinking by routine clichés, conventions, standardized responses, and expressions. Arendt (1971) asked, “Could the activity of thinking as such, the habit of examining . . . be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even condition them against it?” (p. 5).

When Arendt witnessed the Eichmann trial, she became even more aware of how important it was for men to exercise judgment—judgment, she explained, is the bridge between thought and action. Making judgments is not a mechanical process of applying a rule or a law; it is an art that must be carried out within the realm of choice. Eichmann acknowledged no incongruity between the laws of the criminal society of Nazis and what was right in the moral sense.

Arendt’s (1978) observation from her work *The Life of the Mind* was that the activity of thinking is a solitary endeavor—a dialogue with oneself in order to formulate moral principles—this is found throughout Facing History’s approach. Judgment, however, requires dialogue with others and that discourse is what we create when we bring history and ethics together with teachers and students. As Arendt (1963) writes, “The world is not humane because it is made by human beings, and it does not become more humane just because the human voice sounds in it, but only when it has become the subject of discourse. However much we are affected by the things of the world, however deeply they may stir and stimulate us, they become human for us only when we can discuss them with our fellows” (p. 2).

Jacob Bronowski, a philosopher, is another of my “virtual teachers.” In his extraordinary TV documentary, *The Ascent of Man*, he taught me about the power of individual choice. In one segment, Bronowski (1973) stood before the crematorium at Auschwitz, and tells viewers:

It is said that science will dehumanize people and turn them into numbers. That is false, tragically false. Look for yourself. This is the concentration camp and crematorium at Auschwitz. This is where people were turned into numbers. Into this pond were flushed the ashes of some four million people. And that was not done by gas. It was done by arrogance. It was done by dogma. It was done by ignorance. When people believe that they have absolute knowledge, with no test in reality, this is how they behave. This is what men do when they aspire to the knowledge of the gods. Science is a very human form of knowledge. We are always at the brink of the known, we always feel forward for what is to be hoped. Every judgment in science stands on the edge of error, and is personal. Science is a tribute to what we can know although we are fallible. . . .

Thus, the Facing History and Ourselves curriculum begins with an exploration of the relationship between the individual and society and a focus on decision making and choice. Hannah Arendt’s writing actually helped influence the way Facing History and Ourselves is organized. She stressed the importance of thinking about one’s own thinking in a silent dialogue with

oneself to formulate moral principles and then examining those thoughts in public spaces. Thus students consider how identity is formed and how we as individuals acquire membership in various groups. In an early edition of FHAO's resource book (*Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*), a chapter about discrimination with an emphasis on anti-semitism followed the opening lessons. In our latest edition of the resource book, the history of antisemitism is interwoven throughout the history. A new chapter on membership and citizenship explores who is in our universe of obligation and what rights and protections are needed to insure justice and equality. Equipped with lessons about the individual and society, the text examines events that led to the Holocaust. Students study not only what happened but also why it happened. They learn about the role played by the bystanders as well as those of the victims, perpetrators, and opportunists. As the students explore the challenges of citizenship in the Weimar Republic and the ways that prejudices influenced neighbor to turn against neighbor, they gradually understand the dangers of resolving complex problems by dividing the world into "us" and "them" and then blaming "them" for all of the ills of society. They also begin to realize that few events in history are inevitable. Most are the result of choices made by countless individuals and groups. Even the smallest of those decisions may have profound consequences that affect generations to come.

Just as Bronowski and Arendt emphasize that judgment results from the interaction of ideas, the Facing History program stresses that students need to examine a variety of perspectives on issues, placing themselves in situations of others, and learning to listen to differing, at times conflicting, points of view. They do this in one of the most treasured of America's civic spaces: the classroom.

### BEGINNING WITH STUDENTS

In the fall of 1976, Bill and I taught the Holocaust unit we developed at our respective schools—he at Lincoln and I at Runkle. As we taught lessons, we documented our experiences and shared our findings. We encouraged our students to do the same. One entry in the journal I kept that year began with these words: "The Facing History classes are the absolute high point of my day. The discussion is so fascinating; the kids are so interesting. I hope that those who teach it next year will do just one thing—treat kids as much as possible with seriousness and respect for their ideas, but demand a fair classroom atmosphere where rules of fairness are enforced."

We began then in much the same way we begin today—with issues important to our students. We struggled to address their concerns about racism, antisemitism, violence, and hatred and their questions about courage, hope,

and resistance. Their passion for truth in all of its complexity gave direction to our efforts. We consulted many of the nation's leading scholars in history, ethics, and adolescent development to critique our content and assess our methodology. We also turned to Holocaust survivors and other resource speakers to help our students find meaning in the past. The journals our students kept documented their growing knowledge and thoughtful insights. With their permission, we used those journals to revise, rewrite, and sometimes rethink lessons.

Lisa Krakow, a student in my first Facing History class and now a lawyer, says that the course “helped to shape not only my moral sensibilities but also to give me a healthy dose of skepticism and fear of that which is ordinary. I learned,” she recalls, “that when I see something that I know is wrong to not only trust my intuition and judgment but to speak up. And I learned that when somebody tells you to do something that makes no sense, you stop and ask why.”

A parent told us, “In no other course was [my daughter] exposed to real dilemmas as complex and challenging. In no other course has she been inspired to use the whole of her spiritual, moral and intellectual resources to solve a problem. In no other course has she been so sure that the task mattered seriously for her development as a responsible person.” After hearing her son discuss the unit, Elizabeth Dopazo, the parent of a student in one of Bill's classes, decided it was time to tell her own story. Elizabeth spoke to Facing History classes about what it was like to grow up in Nazi Germany. She and her brother lived with their grandparents during the war. Although the Nazis had imprisoned her father because of his religious belief—she was a Jehovah's Witness—she became a Nazi youth leader. Her story raised issues about the education of Nazi youth and brought the lessons about propaganda, conformity, and obedience to a new level for our students.

The unit also attracted attention from our colleagues. Brookline teachers, school librarians, and counselors offered their help. Our original team included Marcus Lieberman, an evaluator, and Barbara Perry, our documentarian. Barbara used the journal she kept as one of the first Facing History teachers to help other educators learn about the program. Her journal stands as the model lesson for any teacher using Facing History and Ourselves. Margaret Drew, a school librarian, prepared an annotated bibliography that became a standard in the field. The Runkle School librarian, Judith Botsford, previewed films and recommended books for students. Art teacher Barbara Traietti Halley created lessons as the curriculum developed. Ruth Ellen Fitch (then the Director of the METCO program for Brookline; a program that brought inner-city minority children into suburban schools in the greater Boston area) and many others made Facing History a reality in each of the eight middle schools in Brookline.

At the end of that first year, my students wanted to know: “Who was responsible for the evil?” and “Were the wrongdoers punished?” They were asking about judgment. To answer their questions, we turned to John Fried, who served as special legal consultant to the United States War Crimes Tribunals at Nuremberg, Germany, from 1947 to 1949, to write a chapter on the International War Crimes Tribunals for the 1982 edition of our resource book. Years later, as students wondered whether one person really could make a difference, we added a chapter that focused on democratic participation. These two chapters—now so fundamental to every Facing History course—grew out of the questions and concerns of our students.

As the unit evolved, Hank Zabierek said of it:

The curriculum is about more than the Holocaust. It’s about the reading and writing and arithmetic of genocide, but it’s also about such R’s as rethinking, reflecting, and reasoning. It’s about prejudice, discrimination, and scapegoating; but it’s also about human dignity, morality, law, and citizenship. It’s about avoiding and forgetting, but it’s also about civic courage and justice. In an age of “back to basics,” this curriculum declares that there is one thing more basic, more sacred, than any of the three R’s—namely the sanctity of human life. (Facing History and Ourselves, *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book*, 1994, p. xxiv)

At the end of that first year of teaching Facing History and Ourselves, Bill and I applied for and received a federal grant that allowed us to pilot the program throughout our school system, and, ultimately, in systems in other parts of the state. The grant also allowed me to leave the classroom and devote my time to creating an adult development model that would introduce other teachers to this important history and to strategies for connecting history to moral questions. Our first workshops included art teachers, librarians, and language arts instructors as well as social studies educators. Professor Henry Friedlander, a noted Holocaust scholar, came to speak at the first workshop for Brookline teachers.

## GROWTH AND EXPANSION

In the fall of 1976, I was Facing History’s only full-time employee. We doubled the staff the following year when Bill came on full-time. We revised the original unit and published it as our primary resource book, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior* (1982), and created the following rationale:

The “Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior” curriculum is specifically designed for adolescents, and their school and home community, to promote awareness of the history of the Holocaust and the genocide

of the Armenian people, an appreciation for justice, a concern for interpersonal understanding, and a memory for the victims of those events.

Since the universal questions of morality and the lessons to be learned from a history of totalitarianism, racism, and dehumanization are not unique to the Holocaust, comparisons and parallels are made to past and contemporary issues, events, and choices when appropriate. For example, when students think about why they study this history, they ask, “Can we learn from the past?” In this context, the “forgotten genocide” of the Armenian people, which happened just 25 years before the Holocaust, takes on new meaning. Students argue, if their teachers keep silent about the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide, they deny them the chance to prevent such an event from happening again.

This study recognizes “. . . that there were differences in degree, circumstances, and intent on the suffering imposed upon Jews, Gypsies, and Slavs” and that the effects of Nazi brutality have left an indelible mark on the collective memory of them all. This study recognizes that what is unique about the Holocaust is that the Nazis used the tools of modern technology and the bureaucracy of a modern nation to carry out a policy of extermination of every Jewish person in Europe with the cooperation of citizens, army, and industry. The Nazis’ thorough documentation of the event has left us with the details of human behavior in extreme situations that make this major historical event critical to any study in morality, law, and citizenship.

In this curriculum, students investigate the use and abuse of power, obedience, loyalty, decision-making, and survival as they further develop their notions of justice. They identify the role and responsibilities of the individual within a given society in times of choice. Materials and activities are designed to encourage students to struggle with issues and dilemmas that defy simple solutions. And when students confront the Holocaust, the war within a war, these materials help students make a leap in their imaginations to think about the choiceless choices of the history. They study this history to learn that this event was not inevitable.

Students are stimulated to reason and think about the implications for a society that abuses civil liberties and censors freedom to think. They grapple with the role of the victim, the victimizer, and the bystander as they explore a wide range of human responses. Later then, they are compelled to think about judgment, in moral as well as legal terms.

As Hannah Arendt once asked, “Could the activity of thinking, as such . . . be among the conditions that make men abstain from evil-doing or even actually condition them against it?” If we are to meet our present problems in human and creative ways, it is most urgent that we face history and ourselves (Strom and Parsons, 1982, p. 13).

As interest in the program grew, we created a teacher-training team—educators who taught the course, reviewed new lessons, introduced the program to other teachers, and then helped those teachers implement it in their classrooms. With the help of Sonia Weitz, whose memoir, *I Promised I Would Tell*, we (FHAO) later published, we brought together our first group

of Holocaust survivors who spoke to classrooms of students and advised us as we built the organization of Facing History and Ourselves. At about the same time, Father Bullock and Reverend Spencer Parsons launched our first clergy group. Members of the group also spoke to student groups and advised FHAO on various fronts.

Gradually we built a team. Facing History has benefited from what I call the Facing History “fairy godmother,” for when we are in need a friend appears. These friends and staff members epitomize the commitment, flexibility, and loyalty that characterizes the Facing History and Ourselves community. On a flight home from a conference on the Holocaust in Toronto in 1979, the last year of our initial federal grant, Father Bullock and I discussed whether we could continue without federal funding. He insisted we must. His friend Bob O’Shea provided the initial funds for a consultant. Out of that meeting came the determination to create a nonprofit.

In the early 1980s, we began hiring program associates to help us disseminate the program and support teachers who were trying to implement our content and methodology in their classrooms. The first was Roberta Snow who later left Facing History to start Educators for Social Responsibility. Marc Skvirsky, Steve Cohen, Mary Johnson, Jan Darsa, Alan Stoskopf, and Phredd Matthews Wall have been on staff since the beginning. When Bill Parsons left the organization in 1987, later to join the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, I could turn to the Board of Directors to help foster our growth.

Friend by friend we developed a presence in Boston and around the country. Today our Board of Trustees and our regional advisory boards—almost two hundred strong—learn with us and insure our future. The Board’s early commitment to Facing History and Ourselves made it possible for us to reach more teachers and more schools. As our outreach expanded, so did publicity about the organization. Publications that reached a national audience and independent studies on the effectiveness of the program further extended our outreach and enhanced our reputation. Our approach began to attract support from foundations and corporations interested in urban parochial and private schools.

In 1990, with the opening of the Anne Frank Exhibit, we created our first regional office in Chicago. Later, with the same exhibit and programming, we opened a Memphis office. By the mid-1990s, Facing History had a staff of fifty-six in four cities across the United States; today we have over one hundred employees in eight regions. Each region has an advisory board chaired by local leadership committed to developing a national and now international organization. Through these regional offices, we have introduced our methods and materials to over twelve thousand teachers both in the United States and abroad. In turn, those teachers bring Facing History and Ourselves to about one million students annually.

Our outreach efforts in the 1990s included institutes not only for middle and high school teachers within our regions, but also for law enforcement personnel, preservice teachers, professors of education, and others throughout the United States and abroad. Throughout these years the U.S. Department of Education designated Facing History and Ourselves as a model program worthy of being disseminated across the country. Our programs grew in record numbers. In one of our model schools, Boston Latin High School, a group of Facing History students created a website ([www.learnquestion.com](http://www.learnquestion.com)) to share their insights on Facing History and Ourselves.

Our latest and most ambitious outreach effort is our newly designed website "<http://www.facinghistory.org>". There visitors can follow Facing History students, teachers, and resource speakers through an interactive tour of the Facing History and Ourselves program. As they explore the site, viewers can access those same resources mentioned by the Facing History students and teachers in their reflections and stories. The site also includes an online campus that connects Facing History teachers and students around the world (approximately fifteen thousand teachers have accounts). Our website represents Facing History's commitment to expanding its impact through technology. After the events of September 11, 2001 (the terrorist attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center in New York City and part of the Pentagon, and that resulted in thousands of deaths), we created a specially dedicated segment of our website for our international communities confronting collective violence in the twenty-first century.

### EXPANSION OF FACING HISTORY TO AN INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE

In many ways, Facing History has been an international organization from its inception. For the past twenty-five years we have welcomed European educators to our institutes and have nurtured connections with European ministries of education, museums, research centers, universities, and independent scholars.

In the early 1980s, Father Bullock and I brought Facing History to the attention of educators in England. Since then Facing History has been introduced to educators in Europe, Israel, Brazil, and South Africa.

In 1995 Marc Skvirsky and I were invited by Arnold Thaler and Elie Wiesel to plan a conference, entitled *Tomorrow's Leaders*, for students from conflict areas around the world. At the conference in Venice, Italy, I met Judge Richard Goldstone of the Constitutional Court of South Africa who participated in the International War Crimes Tribunal at the Hague for Rwanda and Bosnia. When I later visited South Africa, Judge Goldstone arranged for me to meet activists who were creating a new democracy in South Africa—from

the Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, to Alex Boraine who was working on the early roots of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to the moral voices of Bayers Naude and Charles Villa Vicenzio. Their work influenced me and gave direction to our plans to work with South African educators. When journalist Bill Moyers asked us to write a study guide for his PBS program on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, *Facing the Truth*, we were ready. The guide enhances the chapter on judgment in our resource book, and includes lessons about the many ways nations respond to collective violence.

Since 1992, Facing History's materials and methodologies have been adapted for use in schools in Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. Hundreds of European teachers from more than twenty-five countries have become acquainted with Facing History's methodology and resources. We have held teacher-training institutes in Europe; seminars on tolerance for students who attend state and international schools in Europe; study tours in Eastern Europe for our staff and board; and established working relationships with major research institutes in Europe, including the Memorial House of the Wannsee Conference (Europe), the Fritz Bauer Institute (Frankfurt am Main), Stichting Sinitwerk Best (the Netherlands), Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum (Oswiecim, Poland), the Center for Human Rights Education (Prague, Czechoslovakia), and the Musee Memorial des Enfants d'Izieu (France). We have also established ties with the International Romani Union, and the Landelijke Sinti Organisatie.

Our resource book has also been translated for use in Hungarian state schools. In 2001 we approached the Slovak Republic to develop textbooks for schools and the Ministry of Education in Romania to integrate Facing History systemwide. Teachers are incorporating the program in classrooms from Albania to Hungary and Kazakhstan. Today Facing History students and teachers in (the United States) engage in conversations and lessons on the Internet with European students and teachers.

### AN EMPHASIS ON EVALUATION

From the start, evaluation was central to our work. We encouraged both students and teachers to keep journals. Those journals offered insights into the ways that students interpreted what they read, saw, and heard. Their essays, poetry, and other writings also helped us assess their learning. In reflecting on this work, Lisa Colt, an art teacher at an independent school in Dedham, MA, wrote:

Much is demanded of those who participate in Facing History and Ourselves—not the least of which is the continued capacity to experience sadness, to avoid the lure of easy answers and stereotypes that can easily distance us from human



experience and from each other. Yet, for all the weight of the subject matter, this curriculum is strangely hopeful. By reminding us that history is largely man-made, it suggests what civilization is and what it may become is directly related to each one of us. . . . [Students' journals] teach us much about the courage, diversity and compassion of the young—all of which are human resources to be treasured and nurtured into maturity.

We also used a variety of tests to measure what our students were learning. Professor Marcus Lieberman of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a member of the original Facing History and Ourselves team, helped us link theory to practice by creating our first formal evaluation. It was a written exam that measured students' knowledge of both the history of the Holocaust and interpersonal understanding. Lieberman chose measures developed by Harvard Professor Robert Selman—in particular, the measure of interpersonal understanding was employed to assess Facing History and Ourselves' impact on students. A number of external evaluations were also conducted that demonstrated increased knowledge of historical content, greater capacity for moral reasoning, empathy and social interaction, and improved self-perception in Facing History students (Brabeck, 1994; Presseisen, 1995; Glen, 1982; Bardige, 1983). Case studies by Carleen Larson, 1991; and Melinda Fine, 1995, were also published.

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) (Glynn et al., 1982) sponsored a study which showed that of four programs that addressed the Holocaust, Facing History and Ourselves rated highest in holding student interest and in learning factual knowledge about history, while producing an increased awareness of individual and group difference. The study also found students more motivated to read, write, and express their own feelings as they generalized from specific historical situations to their own lives.

In 1980, the U.S. Department of Education recognized Facing History and Ourselves as an “exemplary model education project worthy to be disseminated and adopted across the country.” After an independent evaluation of the program and its effectiveness with both students and teachers, Facing History was invited to join the Department of Education's prestigious National Diffusion Network (NDN) in order to expand its outreach to schools in other parts of the nation. During the sixteen years that Facing History was a member of NDN, we were required to regularly submit evaluation results to an independent panel of experts for validation.

In 1983, Betty Bardige, under the direction of Professor Carol Gilligan of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, completed the first doctoral thesis (“Reflective Thinking and Personal Awareness: Students Face the Holocaust and Themselves”) that measured the effectiveness of Facing History and Ourselves. After analyzing hundreds of student journals, Betty's findings confirmed the importance of Facing History's approach to linking history to ethics.

Our most recent evaluation—and the largest to date—took place over a two-year period, 1996–1998, with the support of the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Carnegie Corporation wanted to learn more about the dynamics of racial and ethnic prejudice among young people and identify strategies that foster intergroup understanding. The study, conducted by an independent research team, was divided into two parts—a comparative analysis and an in-depth ethnographic study of a single class. In the comparative study, researchers administered, at the beginning and the end of the school year, a number of tests to two groups of eighth graders—four hundred in all. Half were enrolled in a Facing History class, while the other half served as a control group. The two groups scored similarly on the first battery of tests. However, by the end of the year, differences had emerged. Facing History students scored significantly higher on relationship maturity scales. They also expressed more positive feelings toward and a greater willingness to interact with other ethnic groups.

The second part of the study focused on students in a single Facing History class. A trained observer documented their learning and conducted student interviews before and after taking the course to assess its impact. The results confirm our belief that adolescents are deeply concerned about issues of injustice in their own relationships and often make important connections between those issues and the course. After completing Facing History, students seemed more aware that the role of “bystander” is not a neutral choice in history or in their own lives. Many had also begun to reflect on the roles they play in their own community, to recognize injustices, and to seek opportunities for care and compassion.

While the Carnegie study was underway, we took part in a joint endeavor with Harvard Graduate School of Education Professor Howard Gardner. Over a two-year period, members of our staff and the staff of Gardner’s Project Zero met with a group of experienced Facing History teachers to consider how students understand history and then apply it to their lives. They began by examining the ways that Facing History students begin to replace stereotypical thinking with more complex understandings. They also examined how adolescents view the relationship between the individual and society and how they express moral concerns through the arts.

We have long used these and other forms of evaluation to deepen our understanding of the ways students relate to the course. These assessments also help us improve existing lessons and design new ones. Our goal is to help students to think critically about the choices people make not only in history, but also in relation to their own lives. These recent studies provide evidence that Facing History students do indeed begin to think deeply about their own decisions. In the Carnegie study, for example, boys who described themselves at the beginning of the year as “frequent fighters” reported a drop in their own “fighting behavior” after taking Facing History and Ourselves.

Such evaluations have confirmed our conviction that adolescents are capable of handling a rigorous course that demands their best thinking. They can and do make comparisons and distinctions between history and their own lives. In their journals and essays, students reveal not only the power of the course but also their ability to handle real history in all of its complexities. One student, reflecting on her Facing History course, urged that we look at all of our history, not just the comfortable parts. “It is from the uncomfortable parts,” she reminds us, “that we really learn.” She likens her learning before taking Facing History to “sitting in a classroom with steamed up windows. Light comes in but you cannot see out. History, when taught well, can make that glass transparent. You can see and make clear the relationship between what we learn in school and our own lives.”

Yet another student in California wrote:

The study of the Holocaust puts into high relief all the giant ideas we should value about America. Freedom of speech is not an abstraction. Neither is freedom of religion. Neither is the balance of powers between government branches. America, or maybe I should say the idea of America, is amazing. It seems that it is being reborn or tested and rebuilt every day. And it all seems that much more amazing when you look at what totalitarianism was and is. On the other hand, America, or the idea of America, is in danger all the time, from itself. We still struggle with issues of hatred and racism and social injustice.

Feedback from our students, teachers, and parents suggests that the Facing History program, in a variety of educational settings, is reaching its goals. In some cases, the influence has been subtle, with students observing that they have begun to think differently about stereotypes and race, and will find it harder to be passive bystanders when they witness acts or words of brutality. In other instances, the changes have been more dramatic, with students vowing to take direct steps to combat prejudice and intolerance in their communities.

Teachers often report that their students relate issues raised in the Facing History program to their own lives, and that each may feel the impact at a different point in their lives. There is one point, however, at which it is virtually impossible for participants to avoid confronting issues close to home—a discussion on racism, prejudice, or discrimination in the context of a Facing History unit almost invariably draws connections to the racism within our society, especially within our schools and neighborhoods. Program evaluations have demonstrated that students and teachers in the program gain an expanded awareness of social justice issues. In one telling instance, a student, who had drawn a swastika in his notebook erased the symbol after taking Facing History and learning its Nazi connotations.

By looking at the concepts of the individual and society at the beginning of a Facing History course, students learn how identities are formed. They

learn to recognize decision-making situations, and to understand what social factors may influence the types of decisions an individual makes. They come to appreciate difference and to understand the power that labels and stereotyping may have on our decision making. At the same time, they look at times where the idea of difference has been abused, such as those instances where race has turned to racism or ethnicity to ethnocentrism or national pride to nationalism. Students investigate themes of power, prejudice, scapegoating, obedience, and loyalty as they develop their concept of the individual as a decision maker in society. These lessons are designed to help students clarify conflict situations, while introducing a process for decision making. Below, a student describes this learning process and refers to the course's lessons:

During the beginning weeks, the focus was on identity. Questions like "Who am I?" "Where do I come from?" and "How might others see me?" We created identity charts that described ourselves. I grew up in a bilingual, biracial, multi-ethnic household. We came to realize that in order to have others understand us, we first need to have an idea of who we were. One of the most memorable Facing History readings for me was "Little Boxes," an essay by Anthony Wright, a young man whose background is as mixed as my own. I was shocked to learn that I was not the only one who could identify with what he wrote.

I had unwittingly placed my peers in boxes and categories. It was not until all of us in class looked carefully at our identities that I realized that there were times when we couldn't fit into a box: racially, economically, religiously, or politically. That day, we put away facades, superficial stereotypes, and imposed labels. . . . It was this shared experience that remains indelible in my mind as one of the biggest steps towards class unity, because once we were able to understand our own identities, we were able to understand those of others.

Another lesson used at the beginning of the program is a reading about a high school student named Eve. Students view a videotape of Eve discussing her experiences with Elie Wiesel, a survivor of Auschwitz and a noted author of many Holocaust-related works (*Facing History and Ourselves, A Discussion with Elie Wiesel*, 1994). Facing History teachers use this lesson, and others like it, to deepen students' understandings of peer pressure. Because the program concentrates on times of prevention and choice, the story is a resource for a discussion about the various choices that individuals make—and why they make these choices. Students writing in their journal often connect this story to their own experiences. One student describes how a class became engaged by this approach:

One of the things we learned was how "in" groups and "out" groups are formed, and how people feel when they are part of a group and how it feels to be left out. We read a story entitled "The In Group" in which an eighth grade girl, Eve, talks about being one of two outcasts in her class. She recalls one day in the

schoolyard when the “in group” found the diary of the other outcast girl. Eve is invited to join the “in group” to read and laugh at the other girl’s private writings. Looking back, the narrator wonders how she could have participated in mocking this girl when she knew what it was like to be mocked herself. She then went on to say “Often being accepted by others is more satisfying than being accepted by oneself, even though the satisfaction does not last.”

After these initial lessons which explore issues of membership and the individual and society, students examine the particular case study—Germany in the 1920s and 1930s—where a democratic society failed and neighbor was turned against neighbor, ultimately leading to state-sponsored genocide of Jews, the mentally ill, and other minority groups such as Sinti/Roma (“Gypsies”). The focus is on individual and group behavior in a particular historical context—the many small decisions that individuals made well before the genocide. What was the role of doctors, of lawyers, of teachers? What was the role of mothers, fathers, and the clergy? What choices did people have and what choices did they make? Students examine the education planned for the Hitler Youth groups and compare it to their own. They learn the stories of a Holocaust survivor. Students begin to develop a vocabulary that identifies the actions of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. As students learn about prejudice and discrimination in the past, they respond by thinking about and considering multiple points of view, and about cause and effect. A student reflects on how she began to connect history to her own thinking:

By looking at some of the decisions people made in Germany in the 1930’s, we begin to think about our own. Because of Facing History, I began to think about how I think and react and how important decision-making is in my life. Facing History changed the way I looked at people and history. Whenever I studied history, I always thought about it as something awful to learn because I was going to be graded on it. I never saw the people in it. But in a Facing History class everything was different. I used my own mind and I started to ask why and how. We always got to connect back to ourselves. This was the first time I was thinking in a history class.

After students study the rise of Nazism and the genocide of the Holocaust, they ask about judgment. “Who is guilty?” “Who was punished?” Students can examine not only their response to the International War Crimes Tribunal at Nuremberg, but also the various ways that society responds to collective violence and seeks to prevent it in the future. Connections are made between history and the moral choices individuals confront in their own lives as democratic participants in an increasingly global society. One student struggled to express the link between individual responsibility and collective violence:

Does anyone accept guilt for the Holocaust? Not Americans, not Roosevelt or a previous Congress or an apathetic public. Not Europe—the countries were

too weak to oppose Germany and too caught up in their own recovery from World War I. Not the Germans—probably most would claim they knew nothing about it, or, if they did know, that they had nothing to do with it. Probably not even Hitler—doubtless he would feel no guilt, only remorse that his “final solution” didn’t succeed. Then who? Who is guilty? To say that we are all—although it may very well be true—is too easy. A Holocaust can happen only because no one feels directly responsible for it. It makes it all the easier to kill by saying “You’re just as responsible as I am.” But that won’t stop the killings. Who is guilty? The man who gives the orders or the man who carries them out? . . . I don’t feel guilty for the Holocaust. The fact that I wasn’t even alive at the time would seem to prove my innocence. But mustn’t we all, as members of society, take responsibility for the past, the present and the future of the society we live in?

Finally, students consider choices and actions that can prevent the violence that results from hatred. Many examples are provided of people whose caring and compassion have made a difference. Other stories from history provide students with case studies to talk about what one can do to make a difference.

A Facing History and Ourselves class can inspire students to connect the lessons they have learned about standing up for others in their everyday lives. Students often tell stories that remind us of the power of a single person to make a positive difference. For instance, not all that long ago, two female students were riding the subway in Boston. One of the girls had grown up in a country where holding hands with classmates was customary. Others on the subway observed this and began teasing the girl and calling her “gay.” These verbal attacks quickly escalated to real violence as the girl was attacked, beaten, and kicked while others stood by and watched. When the incident was discussed in a Facing History classroom in an urban school, students decided to organize a “ride against hate.” They printed leaflets, wrote to public officials, created press releases, and painted signs. The students then rode the subways, gathering signatures for a petition against hate crimes. According to one student, in their Facing History and Ourselves class they had begun to understand what happened if people are silent: “What I learned is that instead of just watching bad things happen around you and realizing that they are bad, you can actually have an effect on the world by taking some action.”

John Dewey, an educator and philosopher, believed that schooling should be linked to the overall life of the student, with an emphasis on experience, problem solving, and community (Dewey, 1938). Education stemmed from dealing with real life as opposed to curriculum. Facing History and Ourselves embodies its educational philosophy in its name; the program is structured to involve real history and real connections to our lives and communities today. A student describes it well:

This course is about examining history. It is about memory. We have to remember what happened, that is facing history. And then, if we can use that in our lives, take it in, and make it a part of our identity, individually or as a community, then we are dealing with ourselves.

While other programs may involve simulations or other exercises meant to elicit a learned response, Facing History and Ourselves stresses real choices made by real people, in history and today. As one teacher who uses Facing History's approach put it:

The Facing History classroom is alive. It is a place where students, in John Dewey's words, become a community of learners. Students are encouraged to be mindful, to reflect, and to gain a deeper appreciation of the life in us and in others. And in doing all of this, Facing History and Ourselves empowers students to act, to see how each of us can make a difference to help create a more just, more compassionate society. (Facing History and Ourselves, *Annual Report*, 1996)

### **WORKING WITH EXPERTS IN VARIOUS FIELDS TO ENRICH FACING HISTORY'S ENDEAVORS**

During my graduate work at Harvard Graduate School of Education in Moral Education, I met researcher/author Professor Carol Gilligan. Her groundbreaking research and writing on how adolescent students learn, her work on girls' learning and development, and her more recent work on boys has deeply influenced our work. Carol and I cochair the Harvard/Facing History and Ourselves project which promotes research about the violence and intolerance that threaten democracy. Its ambitious research agenda includes the development of strategies and curriculum material to engage students in learning about democratic citizenship and ethics and in exploring lessons of civic courage and responsibility. Our interactive, multimedia traveling exhibit, "Choosing to Participate," was developed under this partnership.

Carol and her husband, Dr. James Gilligan, participate in our conferences, teach our teachers, and deepen our commitment to staff development about adolescent development and prevention of violence. We rely on them and other friends in academia to consult with us on developing new materials, and concepts for conferences and retreats and also to meet with our staff, our board, and our wider community. Indeed, the early recognition of our work in academic journals and books on moral education helped spread the word about Facing History. In each region, many of these scholars are featured speakers whose insights about the history we study and its legacies keep our work timely and relevant.

In 2001, we announced that Michael Berenbaum, Professor of History at UCLA (and former Director of Research at the United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum), will be the first Facing History scholar-in-residence. Michael will make visible the intellectual and moral teachings that he has provided to our staff and teachers since our beginnings. Michael will help educate our community about the place the Holocaust has in the moral imaginations and historical learnings of the twenty-first century.

## LEARNING AS A LIFELONG PROCESS

Teachers have come to appreciate the rigor of our content, the moral questions we raise, and the principles of cooperation we embody. They value the way our materials and methods can be adapted to their own particular needs and the assistance they receive from a dedicated staff, committed volunteers, and talented scholars and resource speakers.

Facing History is rooted in a model of moral, social, and cognitive development that honors learners of all ages and acknowledges their need to be stimulated and inspired at the highest levels. Our programs and materials link theory and practice, content and methodology, school and community, head and heart. Harvard Professor Anthony Appiah, a member of our Board of Trustees and a Facing History resource speaker, once explained in an interview with Facing History staff, "What Facing History teaches people to do is to talk to each other about moral questions and to see that you can have dialogue among people even if they don't all agree." That idea shapes our institutes and workshops. It also influences the way we regard educators who take part in those institutes and workshops. They become valued participants in a community that promotes and supports good teaching and honest confrontations with history in all of its complexities.

In 1985, we held our first Facing History and Ourselves Human Rights and Justice Conference, "The Impact of Nuremberg: Today and the Future." As all of our conferences do, it began with a year of study that focused on an issue important to our students. This first conference responded to the questions that our students have continued to ask about judgment: "Do evil people get punished?" "Who was responsible for the evil in history?" "What is the purpose of a trial?" "Is it to punish evil doing or set a precedent for the future?" "Are individuals responsible for their crimes if they have obeyed the laws of their nation? Or, are there higher laws?" "How does one determine punishment?" "Is everyone equally guilty? Or, do some bear more responsibility than others?" "Can an entire nation be guilty?"

We returned to these questions in a number of subsequent conferences, in 1989, with "The Judgment of Adolf Eichmann: Evil, the Media, and Society" exhibition and conference, and again in 1997, with "Collective Violence and Memory: Judgment, Reconciliation, Education." As an outgrowth of this conference, Martha Minow, a professor of law at Harvard University and cochair



of the conference, published *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History after Genocide and Mass Violence*. Our newest publication, *Race and Membership in U.S. History: The American Eugenics Movement*, was developed out of our 1991 conference entitled "Intellectual and Cultural Roots" of racism and antisemitism.

Over the years, our study guides have reinforced or extended some aspect of a Facing History course. Some guides deepen an understanding of the Holocaust by bringing to classrooms filmmaker Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* or TV documentaries such as *America and the Holocaust*. Others bring to classrooms certain memoirs such as Elie Wiesel's *Night* or interactive CD-ROMs like *Survivors: Testimonies of the Holocaust* produced by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation and *Finding a Voice: The Musicians of Terezin*, produced by the Terezin Chamber Music Foundation that contains music composed during the Holocaust.

Slowly, a model emerged for deepening our own understanding of the history we were teaching and learning and for addressing the questions our students were asking. We have been and are committed to our own development as a staff and to the research and evaluation that nurtures our growth. As a result, we have and do feel compelled to study, mediate and learn about the evolving scholarship, conduct our own research, and analyze the results of our work with teachers and students. Each new effort has deepened our mission. For example, when Facing History and Ourselves first began, we knew little about the Armenian Genocide; however, after meeting Manoog Young of the National Association of Armenian Studies we were introduced to work on the Armenian Genocide. Subsequently, we invited authors and survivors of the Armenian Genocide to our classes. Richard Hovannisian, a professor of Armenian history at UCLA, joined our board and became our teacher at workshops and institutes. Manoog Young, who also joined our board, helped Bill Parsons as he collected information for our first study guide on the Armenian Genocide. Later we incorporated much of the history of the Armenian Genocide (in the chapter entitled "Denial") in yet another revision of *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. Currently, Facing History senior program associate Mary Johnson is developing a comprehensive resource book on the Armenian Genocide for classroom use.

In 1989, we created and published with the help of Mary Johnson, *Elements of Time*, a companion to our primary resource book, *Facing History and Ourselves: Holocaust and Human Behavior*. This work provided us with a unique opportunity to develop classroom materials based on testimonies from the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies housed at Yale University and directed by Professor Geoffrey Hartman.

The opportunity to work with survivor testimonies was not only important but also necessary. The partnership with the Archive also gave us a stronger

voice in the growing community of educators and scholars who were contributing to the history and the teaching about the Holocaust. And it offered our staff and teachers the rare opportunity to develop a context for viewing Holocaust testimonies in classrooms and in our institutes.

The testimonies include the kind of detail that rarely is found in written documents. When words fail, the telling gesture and the silences speak for themselves. Many of the video testimonies help the viewer gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Holocaust. We created video montages of survivors to complement the stories in *Elements of Time*. The opening story is about Samuel Bak, a child survivor of the Holocaust whose art appears on the covers of many Facing History publications.

I first encountered Bak's work at Brandeis University's Rose Art Gallery when I had just begun teaching about the Holocaust. I was so moved by his paintings that I brought the catalogue to my students. As I paged through the photos of his work, my students literally moved their chairs closer to me. His portrayal of mere pears provoked the students to ask, "How could this be art?" My students had been taught to draw a still life—a pear—mirroring reality as closely as possible—but Bak's pears were different. They had smokestacks and bled. They were sensuous and horrible. They seemed to engage my students to the point when they were moving from concrete to abstract thinking. They found his work challenging, engaging, difficult, and important.

His career as an artist, begun in Europe in the camps, has been devoted to recapturing scenes from his childhood in the Vilna Ghetto and nearby labor camp. Throughout his work Bak is preoccupied with concepts of time and childhood memory. Broken clocks in his paintings represent moments of fractured time during his days in the ghetto and labor camp. Birdlike figures with wooden wings seek to fly and symbolize that time flies. For Bak, nothing truly repairs the fragmented times of his youth—a time that, though it has flown, will never be totally erased from his memory.

As Bak observes, much of his art is influenced by his childhood experiences in Vilna:

I must say in a certain way that all these experiences [in the ghetto and labor camp] have become the leitmotif—really the leading force—of what I am doing, what I am painting. I certainly do not make illustrations of things that happened. I do it in a symbolic way, in a way which only gives a sense of a world that was shattered, the world that was broken. . . . (Johnson and Strom, 1989, p. 4)

Lawrence Langer, a noted Holocaust scholar and literary critic, joined our team as we discussed our responses to testimonies. Each week we would identify a question or issue that captured our imaginations from the week's viewings, a discussion would follow, and then Larry would prepare an article for our newsletter.

We knew that only a small portion of our generation and the next would have an opportunity to encounter a survivor. Each year fewer survivors would be able to visit face to face with our children and our children's children. It made our work with the testimonies all the more powerful and urgent. The experience of listening to a survivor bearing witness is like no other experience. Those of us who have had the opportunity to create such a shared experience for our students and colleagues as a part of a course or workshop on the Holocaust knew the impact was transformational.

My personal journey with survivors of the Holocaust actually began years before *Facing History and Ourselves*. One Friday night long before I attended my first conference on the Holocaust, Max, my husband's grandfather, announced that he was planning a trip to Israel to visit his brothers whom he had not seen since he left Poland as a child. As we sat around the table, I asked him to tell us more about his family and his journey to America. Two weeks before his trip, Grandpa Max died suddenly.

Two months later, my husband, Terry, and I went to Israel in his place. I was totally unprepared for the emotional impact of our trip. We met, embraced, and wept with Max's brothers and their families. Although they were strangers, it seemed as if we had known them forever. Later, we visited Yad Vashem, Israel's major Holocaust memorial and research center. There I stood numb. Nothing was familiar. That evening, Terry and I celebrated our fifth wedding anniversary on a kibbutz while children slept in underground bunkers. At the time I wondered if I would ever make sense of the various impressions and experiences.

Many of them lay dormant until we made our second trip to Israel six years later, this time with our son, Adam. During the trip, we learned that we had cousins who had survived the Holocaust. To our surprise, they also lived in Brookline. In fact, Terry and I had shopped in their bakery without realizing that we were among family. When we returned from Israel, we visited their shop. I still remember the embrace Rose gave us when Terry told her, "We are your cousins." I glimpsed the tattoos on their arms as Rose and her husband Nathan pulled out tray after tray and begged us to eat.

While Nathan took Terry and Adam on a tour of the shop, I made conversation with Rose. I naively asked her to tell me about her family and her life in Poland, in much the way I once asked Grandpa Max to share his stories with me. Rose's smile disappeared. Her hand reached for a tissue deep in her pocket, as tears welled in her eyes. Nathan appeared immediately to give her comfort. I felt that I would never ask her such questions again. I had no idea then that her story and the history of the Holocaust would become an intimate part of my days and nights for the years to come.

I now know that in asking Rose to tell me her story, I was asking the impossible. "The experience lies beyond our reach. Ask any survivor," says Elie Wiesel. "He will tell you, he who has not lived the event will never know it.

And he who went through it will not reveal it, not really, not entirely. Between his memory and its reflection there is a wall—and it cannot be pierced. The past belongs to the past and the survivor does not recognize himself in the words linking him to it” (Wiesel, 1977, p. 405).

Later Rose called me. “I’m ready to tell my story,” she said. In doing so, she became my teacher. Rose’s story shattered my reality and invaded my soul. She began:

I lived in my house next to our store—the house was 150 years old—my grandfather’s grandfather’s grandfather . . . Our whole life changed overnight. . . . Why me? And my parents—such hard working people. They tried to raise their kids the best they could. We weren’t hoodlums; we didn’t destroy anything; we wouldn’t do any damage. Why us? Because we were Jewish. . . .

After the Nazis killed her father, uncle, and brother, she and her mother managed to elude the authorities for a time. They hid in the forests, on farms, in haystacks, wherever they could find a place.

Each day became a test of survival. Still in the end, they, like so many others, were herded onto cattle cars bound for Majdanek. Rose wanted to join the many young people who jumped off the train, but her mother begged her to stay.

When we entered Majdanek—the young went to one side; the old to another side. I was going with my mother. We came closer to the soldier and he told my mother to go to this side. “You mean this side,” my mother said. “I’m still young. I can work.”

The soldier said, “If you don’t shut up your mouth, I’m going to beat you to death.” And that’s the last I saw of my mother. She just like disappeared.

The next night Rose called. “Margot,” she said, “You think I’ve told you something. I’ve told you nothing.”

Each year Rose and Nathan come to our house loaded with cookies to celebrate the birthdays of my grandsons, Max and Sam. We are family.

As I learned Rose’s story and later those of other survivors, I would often wonder: “How out of such darkness are they able to see light? How out of such hate are they able to love? How out of such degradation are they able to maintain their dignity? How out of such despair are they able to hope? How is it possible for Rose to talk about the miracle of childbirth as she watches a TV program on the human body? Why did another survivor return to his hometown in Poland in order to say Kaddish for his family?

Facing History and Ourselves staff have also immersed themselves in the testimonies of survivors. And yet, despite all we have read and heard, the stories continue to pierce our hearts and touch our souls. When our staff viewed Claude Lanzmann’s documentary entitled “Shoah,” we understood

the survivor on the film who warned, "If you would lick my heart, it would poison you" (Johnson and Strom, 1989, p. xv).

## REFLECTIONS

Like many who study the Holocaust, I could not put aside the stories of the Holocaust. They found their way into my everyday existence. I felt compelled to be a witness. I dwelled in this history, sometimes suspended in despair, at other times reenergized with a renewed appreciation of love, learning, and life. My obsession with this history gave focus and direction to the growth of Facing History and Ourselves as an organization. It also shaped my personal life. Our daughter, Rachel, twelve years younger than our son, Adam, was born at a time when I was deeply engaged in the study of the Holocaust. After her birth, something curious happened to me. I could no longer contemplate survivors' stories with the same intensity as I had earlier. No longer could I continue to undress my child for her bath with my mind flashing to other images of other mothers and daughters innocently preparing for showers only to find themselves in gas chambers. No longer could I continue to hear in my child's simple questions the testimony of a survivor who recalled her own little girl asking why men were shooting at her and her family. "Mother," she asked, "why did you make me wear the Sabbath dress when we are going to be shot?" Instead, my focus had to be how to teach their stories so that such evil could be prevented.

These stories also forced me to confront my own history. The journey took me back once more to memories of the library in my family home. In that library in 1968, my sister and I, both adults then home on a visit, heard a TV announcer speak words that we would never forget: "Martin Luther King has been shot in Memphis." That moment stands as a symbol, a reminder of all the moments that I had questioned or failed to question, acted or failed to act on in regard to the insidious racial segregation that divided Memphis.

That same evening, as army tanks later rolled through the once quiet streets of our neighborhood, a curfew was announced. Realizing that my sister and I were alone in the house, a neighbor—the father of a childhood friend—volunteered to sit with us. Of course, we welcomed his visit. He appeared a little older and grayer than we remembered, but his arrival gave us the same feeling of warmth and security we had known as children. This time, however, he came with a shotgun. We were startled but not moved to action until he told us, "Don't worry girls. Soon as that nigger's body is out of town, all will be fine." We asked him to leave.

Not long after, my mother died. Our home was sold and in time my father came to Brookline to live with Terry, Adam, and me. (Rachel arrived ten years later.) My father brought with him the books he and my mother had

collected over the years. Now they became part of my family's library, along with Terry's medical books, my ever-growing piles of books on the Holocaust, and our joint collection of history books. The new additions to our library surrounded our children much as they once enveloped my siblings and me. These books continued to warm, tease, and ever remind us.

When Adam was sixteen, he joined my father and me in the living room one afternoon. He carried a copy of Henry Thoreau's *Walden*. He was reading it for a school assignment. I immediately turned to our bookshelves to compare his edition with mine from the 1950s and my mother's from the 1930s. It was a unique opportunity to revisit the past through perusing my mom's underlinings and notes in the margins, even as I listened to my son's perspectives on the book. Adam later inscribed his name in the front of his book, as he added his copy to the others. As adults, both Adam and Rachel trace their own interest in social justice to the books and articles in our family library and their Facing History course.

### A RETURN TO MY ROOTS

During the spring of 2001, Facing History board members and staff traveled to the South to learn more about the civil rights movement. As we prepared for our trip we were informed by the materials we had developed through the Harvard/Facing History and Ourselves Project on the history of eugenics. This work, which deepened our understanding of how unexamined ideas about difference can be used to justify social inequalities, deny opportunities, and legitimize discrimination, helped prepare us for this trip. It is a history that had terrible consequences for democracy here and abroad. During the same summer we conducted two institutes devoted to these new materials and in the fall of 2001 we launched an interactive course on the Web, featuring the connections between American eugenicists and the Nazis.

As we explored the links between the history of racism and antisemitism in America and Germany, we discovered how powerful notions of difference have shaped the last century and how the legacies of those ideas are still tightly woven into the very fabric of our lives. In 1939, the year the Nazis invaded Poland, Billie Holiday introduced "Strange Fruit," a haunting song of protest against lynching in America. Abel Meeropol, an English teacher, said he wrote the song because "I hate lynching and I hate injustice. I hate the people who perpetrated it."

In 1939 the ideas that justified lynching in the United States were also defining Hitler's Germany and fueling his dreams of world domination. Laws isolating Jews, Gypsies, Africans, and others labeled unfit, undesirable, and less than human, were vigorously enforced. Many of these laws were modeled after similar legislation in the United States, but the Nazis took them further.

As the Nazis prepared to conquer all of Europe, Albert Einstein, a refugee from Nazi Germany, wrote President Franklin Roosevelt a letter warning that German scientists were developing an atomic bomb. As a physicist, he understood the weapon's enormous power and, as a Jew, he knew firsthand the threat Hitler's plans posed to people everywhere. The President's reply was noncommittal. Two years later, in 1941, just before the United States declared war on Germany, Einstein wrote a second, more urgent letter to the President. This time there was no reply. An FBI memo suggests why: "In view of his racial background, this office would not recommend the employment of Dr. Einstein, on matters of a secret nature, without a very careful investigation, as it seems unlikely that a man of his background could, in such a short time, become a loyal American citizen" (Bodanis, 2000, p. 130–31). Although the United States was about to wage a war for freedom abroad, many Americans, including some FBI agents, were still held hostage to old myths and misinformation about "us" and "them." As a Zionist, a socialist, and a pacifist, Einstein was the "other" in their eyes.

Suspicion of the "other" was a legacy of the "twisted science" of eugenics. In the early 1900s, it gave legitimacy to racism, antisemitism, and other notions about difference in America and Germany. American eugenicists and their supporters claimed that they could cure society's ills by segregating and ultimately eliminating those defined as "other." Their research was underwritten by the nation's leading foundations, touted by major universities, and routinely quoted by political and religious leaders. Hitler's plans for a racially pure Aryan nation built upon these ideas.

When the United States entered the war in 1941, the nation relegated African Americans to segregated units. Even though they were welcomed as heroes in the nations they helped to liberate, they returned home to the humiliating and often violent traditions of segregation. Many were now more determined than ever to challenge racism at home.

One of those soldiers was Leon Bass, who saw Buchenwald with his own eyes. After the war, he attended a segregated college and eventually earned a doctorate in education. He became a teacher and later a principal. Although he never forgot what he saw in the concentration camp, he did not speak of it until the day he overheard a group of students at his high school challenging a visitor, a Holocaust survivor. Realizing that the students were unable to believe the survivor's story, he stepped into the classroom and told them about his own experience. He explained that as a young black soldier, he thought he knew all about racism. At Buchenwald, he realized that he was not even able to imagine that human beings were capable of slaughtering innocent children, women, and men in the name of "race improvement." Bass has been speaking out ever since—and is a frequent speaker for Facing History programs. Most recently, he told Facing History students in New England and Tennessee what he saw in

Germany and then shared his own stories of the “Jim Crow” South and the civil rights movement.

To Martin Luther King, Jr., the movement and its teachings were not just for African Americans but for all who believed in the nation’s ideals. He, therefore, invited other religious leaders to Selma, Alabama, to march in support of voting rights for African Americans in 1965. Among the first to arrive was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. As a Polish immigrant whose family was murdered during the Holocaust, Rabbi Heschel knew the importance of taking a stand for justice. He locked arms with King and the two men joined a parade of rabbis, ministers, priests, nuns, and ordinary citizens across the Edmund Pettus Bridge toward Montgomery, Alabama. Heschel later wrote, “I felt my legs were praying” (Heschel, 1996, p. vii).

Heschel knew there was a link between his own history and the struggle for social justice in the United States. King also understood that connection. In one of his last speeches, he spoke of his faith in nonviolent direct action. He used the recent history of the Holocaust to speculate about what might have happened if people had heeded Einstein’s warning that “the world is in greater danger from those who tolerate evil than from those who actively commit it.”

Perhaps, he wondered, had there been a broader understanding of nonviolent, direct action in Germany when Hitler was rising and consolidating his power, the brutal extermination of six million Jews and millions of others might have been averted. Germany might never have become a totalitarian nation. As I prepared for the trip to the South, to my home, I began to discover how deeply I had been influenced by these two histories— that of the Holocaust and that of the civil rights movement. For twenty-five years I have had the privilege of confronting the past in a community of adults who learn and students who teach. I am inspired by our conversations and the questions that emerge from our confrontations with these histories. As one Facing History student wrote, “We have to remember what happened—that is history. If we can figure out WHY it happened, this is facing history. And then, if we can use that in our lives, take it in, and make it part of our identity, individually or as a community, then we are dealing with ourselves.”

As we prepare for our next twenty-five years, I am reminded that in some sense our work has just begun.

Like my mother, I turn to our library for comfort and solace. I, too, read from *Gates of Prayer*. One prayer, familiar from my childhood, has been altered by history, much the way I have. It says of God’s commandments:

Teach them faithfully to your children; speak of them in your home and on your way, when you lie down and when you rise up.

The world is not the same since Auschwitz and Hiroshima. The decisions we make, the values we teach must be pondered not only in the halls of learning, but also before the inmates of the extermination camps, and in the sight of the mushroom of a nuclear explosion.



Bind them as a sign upon your hand; let them be a symbol before your eyes.  
The groan deepens, the combat burns, the wailing does not abate. In a free society, all are involved in what some are doing.

Inscribe them on the doorposts of your house, and on your gates. Some are guilty, all are responsible. . . . (Gates of Prayer 1975, 579–80)

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