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1142 East 92nd Street, Brooklyn, NY 11236 • Tel: 1-718-257-0600 • Fax: 1-718-272-0870 • Email: CanarsieC@aol.com

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Photo by Brenda Cox
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Mill Basin

Surviving Buchenwald: Author Brings Family's Holocaust Horror Story to Life

By Robert Pearl

On Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah), April 23rd, the Hebrew Language Academy Charter School, located at 2186 Mill Avenue, welcomed a profoundly moving and unforgettable presentation by Oren Schneider, author of *The Apprentice of Buchenwald*. Eighth-grade students filled the room, eager to hear Schneider recount the stirring, emotional story of his family's survival during one of history's darkest periods.

Schneider, born and raised in Israel and now a Brooklyn resident, stood before the students not simply to recount history, but to bring it alive. Through a vivid slide presentation and select readings from his book, Schneider traced the harrow-

ing journey of his grandfather, Alexander Rosenberg, who, at just 16 years old, was thrust into the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust.

The presentation detailed Rosenberg's life in pre-war Czechoslovakia, the gradual erosion of Jewish rights, the nightmarish deportations and survival against all odds in the notorious Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. Schneider's narration was deeply personal, connecting historical events to the faces and lives of his own family. His words painted images so vivid that students could almost see the families walking to the train stations and hear the cold wind on the roof of the concentration camp barracks.

Buchenwald was liberated by American forces on April 11, 1945. The arrival of U.S. soldiers marked the beginning of freedom for the surviving prisoners, who were skeletal, traumatized and barely alive. Schneider described the emotional moment when prisoners, including his grandfather, realized that they were finally free. An American Sherman tank broke through the camp's gates, greeted by a sea of prisoners who cried, cheered and rejoiced in chaotic, beautiful celebration.

"Life is beautiful," Schneider shared, echoing his grandfather's mantra, "and the most important thing is to think positively, even in the worst of situations." Through hardships almost unimaginable, Rosenberg and his family rebuilt their lives after liberation — a testament to resilience and hope.

Students listened intently as Schneider described how Rosenberg and his father clung to life, literally, by taking turns lying on a single wooden plank through freezing nights, and how they sabotaged Nazi weapons production with the help of Soviet prisoners of war.

Adding a poignant layer to the day, earlier that morning, students also heard from Flora Hogman, a Holocaust survivor who shared her incredible story of survival — from hiding in a Catholic monastery in Italy to being raised by a Buddhist foster mother. Hogman's spirit, humor and curiosity offered a living testament to the resilience of the Jewish people.

True to that spirit, Hogman even tried Ukrainian borscht for the first time during her visit, symbolizing the blend of cultures and enduring hope that continues to carry the Jewish people forward.

This year's Holocaust Remembrance Day carries even greater weight. In the wake of the October 7, 2023, terrorist massacre in Israel by Hamas and the alarming rise of antisemitism on American college campuses and city streets, the echoes of "Never Again" ring more urgently than ever.

Schneider's presentation served as a vital reminder that Holocaust education is not just about remembering the past, but also about confronting hatred in the present — ensuring that future generations understand what is at stake when intolerance and evil are left unchecked.

The Apprentice of Buchenwald, available on Amazon, offers a deeper look into this remarkable true story.

Special thanks to Valerie Khaytina, chief external officer of Hebrew Public, for making these impactful events possible and to the dedicated teachers and students of Hebrew Language Academy for honoring Holocaust remembrance with open hearts and eager minds.

#YomHaShoah #HolocaustRemembranceDay #NeverForget



Author Oren Schneider taking a group picture with HLA's 8th grade students.

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