

HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE AND ISRAEL – Arthur Spiegel’s Legacy.

Arthur Spiegel, a man who was so dedicated to helping New Haveners get to know Israel, also fought in its War for Independence. In 1948 at the age of 17, the future Executive Director of the New Haven Jewish Federation left his home in the Bronx to join the Israeli Defense forces. Spiegel’s wife Merle admired his dedication. She said, “He was a very special guy. What eighteen year-old goes off to Israel to fight?”

After studying at Hebrew University, the London School of Economics and Columbia University, Spiegel dedicated his life to Jewish causes and later to New Haven. In the beginning of his career Spiegel worked for the ADL in New York City, Florida, and Nebraska. While he was with the ADL he risked his life to help register African-Americans voters in the South. Mrs. Spiegel recalled one incident. She said, “He was warned by the F.B.I. that his number was [up], that they were going to get him at a meeting at night. So he escaped the town in garbage barrels in a truck.” Spiegel brought his intelligence, energy and dedication to New Haven in 1965 to serve as the director of the Connecticut regional office of the ADL. In 1968 the Federation named him Executive Director where he would serve until his controversial retirement in 1989. Mrs. Spiegel said of Arthur, “Number one, besides personality and giving and so forth, he was extremely knowledgeable. He was a student of history. He knew when we would have somebody come to New Haven, an academic, a political figure or an ambassador, he was able to relate to them immediately. They had respect for him because they recognized he was a person of knowledge. A lot of our good relationships with Yale came from that.” His two labors of love were Israel and Holocaust remembrance.

BUILDING TO REMEMBER – New Haven’s Memorial to the Six Million.

Many give much of the credit for the building of the New Haven Memorial to the Six Million to Mr. Spiegel. Mrs. Spiegel said, “He made some major contributions. One of the things that he accomplished was an awareness and consciousness of the Holocaust. He heightened everyone’s consciousness. [Another] is the Holocaust Memorial, the collection of funds and the involve-

ment of the city. He was very influential in getting New Haven to donate that land.” Malcolm Weber added, “Arthur had more to do with [the Holocaust Memorial] than anybody else.”

On October 30, 1977 more than 3,000 people witnessed the dedication of the memorial. Jerzy Kosinski, a Holocaust survivor and author of *The Painted Bird*, spoke to the crowd. New Haven became the first city in the nation to designate public land for the six million. New Haven Mayor Frank Logue supported the project after his December 1976 visit to Yad Vashem in Israel. Asked by Holocaust survivors to create a Holocaust Committee as part of the Federation, President Herb Setlow asked Lew Lehrer, a survivor, to chair it.⁹ Lehrer and others met with the mayor after Logue’s trip to Israel and asked about construction of a memorial in New Haven. The idea took off. The city donated land in Edgewood Park on the corner of Whalley and West Park Avenues. George Skolnick was the contractor on the project. Landscaper Marvin Cohen was in charge of plantings for the memorial. Serendipitously, Cohen mentioned the project to his friend, Italian architect Augustus Franzoni. Franzoni signed on to the project pro bono. Franzoni’s design featured a “raised concrete star of David, whose six points are planted with tall yew trees to represent the Six Million Jewish dead. Six steel columns in the center are surrounded by simulated barbed wire. The steel is a type which oxidizes and drops red rust on the cobblestones, symbolizing the shedding of human blood.”¹⁰ More than 800 donations funded the cobblestones that represented the Eastern European ghettos so many of the victims came from. Merle Spiegel wrote the words for the Yiddish and Hebrew plaques that were placed on the monument. They both translate to “remember” in English. Malcolm and Rae Weber made another important contribution to the memorial. Mr. Weber said, “[what] I’m very proud of to this day was personal. Underneath the monument is buried dust from the road at Auschwitz where they carted the dust [of the dead] from the ovens to the river. The dust blew off and it was on that road. Dirt from that road is buried underneath. Rae and I brought that dust back from Auschwitz in 1976. We even had a burial ceremony.”

Prior to sundown on Yom Kippur in September of 1982, a few additions were added to the monument. A semi-circular wall with 18 stones was constructed. Listed on these stones were the names of 23 of Hitler’s death camps. Two additional trees were planted. One tree represented everyone who was killed by the Nazis. Another honored Christians who risked everything to save Jews from the Nazi death machine. More than 2,000 people attended, including Mayor Biagio DiLieto, U.S Representative Lawrence J.

DeNardis, Marvin Lender, Herb Setlow, Lew Lehrer, Dr. Phillip Felig and Paul Goodwin.

YOM HASHOAH – Holocaust remembrance days.

According to Mr. Weber, prior to the 1970s there was some tension between survivors of the Holocaust and the Federation. He said, “The only place where there was any conflict [between Federation and ADL was over the Holocaust survivors]. The Holocaust survivors all got close to ADL. There was a feeling among some of the Holocaust survivors that the Federation didn’t do enough for them.”

Dr. Henry Cohen chaired an event sponsored by the Council to remember the victims of the Holocaust. More than 700 people flocked to the JCC on Chapel Street on April 22, 1971. This was the beginning of the effort to remember the Holocaust on an annual basis. Dr. Phillip Felig, a professor of medicine at Yale, helped create the program. In 1972 he became chairman of the Yom Hashoah.¹¹ This has been one of the Federation’s great success stories, surviving to this day.

The program in April of 1977 coincided with the groundbreaking ceremony for the Holocaust Memorial. Shifra Zamkov and Ray Feiler read poems of remembrance in Yiddish and English. Mayor Frank Logue, then State Senator Joseph Lieberman, designing architect Augustus Franzoni, Marvin Cohen, Bernice Brand, Rabbi Albert Feldman, Reverend Bruce Whittemore and others took part in the groundbreaking. Herb Setlow, Mayor Logue and The Honorable Yaakov Levy, Consul General of Israel gave remarks. Lew Lehrer and William Rosenberg interned the ashes brought back from the camps by Malcolm Webber. Leon Zamkov followed this by reading the Kaddish.

The 1982 program saw 1,800 people witness Sam Gejdenson, the first son of survivors elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, give the keynote address. Marvin Lender gave the introduction.

The Federation sent many to the Senate Chambers of the State Capitol on May 9, 1997 to participate in the 19th Annual Statewide Holocaust Commemoration. Shifra Zamkov chaired the event, featuring speeches by Governor John Rowland, Senate President Kevin Sullivan and human rights activist Mark Talisman. The Ezra Academy Choir performed and there was a candle lighting ceremony. The inaugural year of this commemoration happened in part due to the work of Malcolm Weber.

More recently at the 2004 event, the community remembered the 60th anniversary of Hitler's attempt to destroy the Jews of Hungary. Ambassador Dr. Gabor Horvath, the Hungarian Consul-General spoke to more than 400 people.

These events have been quite memorable for many. Stephen Saltzman said at one of the Yom Hashoah ceremonies, "There was a woman who got up and spoke and told of meeting a friend there just that day. They finally started talking about their history. They realized that they were in the same camp at the same moment as young girls. Both survived."

Another program co-sponsored by the Federation and aided by Malcolm Weber was the videotaping of the testimony of Holocaust survivors. Beginning around 1980 Laurel Vlock, a TV producer, and Dr. Dori Laub, a Yale Medical School Psychiatrist and survivor, taped and catalogued the experiences of survivors.

Arthur Spiegel was a big supporter of Holocaust remembrance activities. He often took part in the educational aspects by giving lectures on the subject. Mrs. Spiegel said, "People involved in the area of the Holocaust recognized that Arthur knew the Holocaust inside out. He could drop dates like nothing at all." Keeping the Jewish people strong through remembrance ceremonies like Yom Hashoah was Spiegel's main goal. "When somebody would suggest an activity, he would say 'is it good for the Jews or not?' He would say, 'does it add to Jewish survival?' That was his criteria for everything," Mrs. Spiegel said.

VISITS TO THE LAND OF MILK & HONEY - Missions to Israel.

New Haven has organized countless missions to Israel. Perhaps none was as spectacular as the one that took place in March 1995. The "Greater New Haven/Israel Friendship Trip" was also known as the "Mega Mission." Organized by Marvin Lender, Murray Lender and David Beckerman, the Mega Mission took more than 200 New Haven residents to Israel. It was the largest delegation ever to travel from Connecticut to Israel. The group traveled to Israel full of hope during the short-lived thaw between the Palestinians and the Israelis. They spent nine days in Israel with some staying on to tour Jordan. They celebrated the bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies of Jennifer