MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT - Professor Gus Lehrer AM FAA

The Sydney Jewish Museum is now a forum for the exchange and discussion of ideas which has enabled it to attract some of the best minds and most interesting personalities.

Although it is true that the Holocaust is a serious subject, one has only to read the comments of some of the 25,000 students who visit the SJM annually, to realise that the message of personal responsibility, which is the core of our educational program, is an uplifting experience for many of our visitors. The same goes for our exhibits about Jewish life in general, and for our special exhibitions, as well as the lectures and discussion panels we regularly host.

Where is all this leading us? Although the SJM is now arguably the pivotal Jewish cultural centre in Sydney, with numerous volunteers and a richly diverse program, it is essential that we continue to develop and improve, because to not do so would be to invite apathy and decline. It is in this context that the Museum is now embarking on several exciting new ventures.

Our successful Capital Appeal has enabled us to undertake an ambitious refurbishment program. We have already completed the first stage, creating the new Education and Resource Centre, which was generously supported by the National Australia Bank and opened by Education Minister Christopher Pyne in 2015. The next stage of this refurbishment will involve the main Holocaust exhibition space.

We will shortly create the new Human Rights and the Holocaust exhibition, generously supported by Lady Mary Fairfax AC, which will expand the current exhibits by depicting examples of human rights abuses by perpetrators of the Shoah.

There will also be other examples of human rights abuses to which present day students will be able to relate, such as early Australian treatment of Aboriginal people. Importantly, although this section will detail human rights abuses during the Holocaust, it will not “relativise” the Holocaust, which is unique in human history. Rather it will distill certain lessons from it, which will be better crystallised in this way, for the benefit of our many visitors.

The SJM is also planning to build on its current programs of teacher training, as well as seminars for Police and employees of aged care facilities and other similar ventures, to create programs in Multicultural Harmony and mutual respect. It is hoped that eventually these programs will become self funding, and could help to defray some of the annual operating deficit of the Museum.

These are ambitious plans which reach far into the future. We derive the confidence to embark on them because of the support we receive, particularly from our major donors, to whom I extend a personal heartfelt “Thank You”, as well as our patrons, visitors, government and leaders in the community. If you are already a supporter of the SJM, I thank you for that support, without which we could not be what we are or do what we do. If you are not currently a supporter, I urge you to become a member of the SJM and enrich your life and that of others.

On behalf of the Museum Board and Staff, the President Professor Gus Lehrer AM FAA, and CEO Norman Seligman, we wish you and your family a happy and healthy Pesach.

www.sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au
MESSAGE FROM THE CEO - Norman Seligman

On behalf of the Museum family I want to congratulate our President Professor Gus Lehrer on his recent and well deserved appointment as a Member of the Order of Australia.

I am delighted to report that student visitors in 2015 reached a new high with nearly 25,000 participating in our education programs. In addition, 23,000 adults visited the Museum, the combined total of 48,000 making it our best year ever.

At the Museum’s Annual General Meeting held at the end of last year, the following Board Members were re-elected: Charles Aronson, Anna Berger, Michael Blitz, Paul Drexler, Margaret Gutman OAM, Michael Jaku, Prof Gus Lehrer AM FAA, David Nemes, Gavin Solsky, Roma Shell and Dr Gary Weiss.

We are also pleased to welcome Anthony Levin, Evan Penn and Jeremy Goldschmidt as new Board Members and saddened to farewell Alex Linden, who did not seek re-election. Alex served as a Board member for ten years including seven as Treasurer, and his wise counsel was valued by his peers on the Board.

Subsequent to the AGM, Professor Gus Lehrer AM FAA was elected President, Roma Shell was elected Vice President and Gavin Solsky was elected Honorary Treasurer. I wish Gus and all the members of the new Board a fruitful and successful year ahead.

The second stage of the 2012 Capital Appeal, comprising a major upgrade to the permanent Holocaust Exhibition and disability access, is now underway. We will therefore be operating under limited capacity for the next seven months.

In order not to impact on the visitor momentum achieved in 2015, we have two temporary exhibitions, Anne Frank and Signs of Life, in place while the permanent Holocaust exhibits are being upgraded. It’s going to be a very challenging time for our staff and volunteers, and we are constantly reviewing our operating procedures to ensure that the visitor experience remains at the high standards we set for ourselves.

I am very pleased to advise that we recently appointed Professor Garry Walter AM and Associate Professor Michael Robertson as visiting Professoral Fellows and Dr Edwina Light as a visiting Fellow.

This Program supports research and education activities of strategic priority for the Museum, enhancing the professional development of staff and volunteers and raising the scholarly and public profile of the Sydney Jewish Museum.

We are extremely fortunate to have over 220 dedicated volunteers involved in many facets of the Museum’s operations, without whom, our Museum would not be able to function nearly as effectively. Our volunteers range in age from early 20’s to mid- 90’s.

We are exceptionally proud that our Survivor volunteers were honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award by Volunteer NSW at the annual awards ceremony.

I would also like to pay tribute to the Museum staff members. There is a very close bond between the staff and volunteers, which goes a long way towards making the visitor experience so special.

Thank you again for your much needed and much appreciated support directly to the Museum and also through the Jewish Communal Appeal. It is vital to ensure the continuity of the valuable work we do on behalf of the Jewish and wider community.

NOTE OF THANKS

We wish to thank all our donors for their generous support of the Museum this past year. Our donors will be duly acknowledged by name in the Museum’s annual Yearbook.
THE LOST LETTERS OF OTTO FRANK

Anne Slade, Museum Volunteer & Natalia Thomas, Marketing Manager

When Museum volunteer Anne Slade first visited the Anne Frank House in 2014, she would never have dreamed she would leave having accepted a seemingly impossible challenge: locating five Australian women who corresponded with Otto Frank following the publication of his daughter’s famous diary.

The project was initiated by Levien Rouw, the Manager of Education Projects at the Anne Frank House. He explained that the Anne Frank House held several thousand letters from people all over the world, who had been touched by the diary and had felt the need to reach out to the sole surviving inhabitant of the secret annex.

Otto (and later with his second wife, Fritzi) had diligently answered all of these letters, writing about his life after Auschwitz, the progress of the Anne Frank House, and addressing the issues and questions expressed by the author of each letter.

With the help of the Museum’s Curatorial, Marketing and Education departments, as well as Charlotte Schaefer, Head of Research, Family Histories Division at Worthington Clark, Anne was able to locate all five “girls”, two of whom had saved the treasured letters from Otto Frank.

The correspondence proved to be a window into the soul of a man who desperately missed his children and became a kind of surrogate father to young people the world over. It was also a powerful demonstration of the ways in which Anne Frank’s life and legacy continues to reverberate to this day.

At age 17, Diana Munro wrote to Otto: “I would be extremely proud to have corresponded with the father of the young girl who showed the world the futility of war, which amounts to wilful murder when a war-crazed people turn to killing innocent children whose only crime is birth. ‘The Diary’ will never be forgotten as it is a reminder to people in the four corners of the earth.”

Otto later responded: “Believe me it is always only the individual who is able and willing to help in creating a better world, never the masses.”

Excerpts of Otto’s ‘lost letters’ are being exhibited at the Museum, before they are sent to the Anne Frank House in Holland. Levien Rouw has declared the program a success and believes that the search for the missing Otto Frank letters, may eventually become a world-wide project.
INSIDE THE UPGRADE - Sarah Haid, Research Assistant

Ask the average person on the street to name the worst places on earth they can think of, and you’re likely to get the answer, “the Nazi concentration camps”. It is just these places that I have spent the last six months researching in-depth for the new permanent Holocaust exhibition.

My research in this area is a change of direction from visiting families in immigration detention centres for the Australian Human Rights Commission, building the capacity of people with disabilities in Timor-Leste, attending bush court in Aboriginal communities in the Top End and working on a human rights research project at Sydney University. However, I see a common thread running through all the different chapters of my career so far: a respect for each person’s inherent dignity and humanity, and a strong drive to defend that humanity when it is under attack. This drive is at the core of human rights.

The concentration camps research work has not been easy. Academically, it has called for lateral thinking and innovative approaches, from consulting obscure historical sources and tracking down German Government publications, to writing to colleagues and institutions overseas. Emotionally, it can be draining – the human stories I encounter are incredibly sad.

Thankfully, I have had wonderful support from my Museum colleagues every step of the way. They have shown me immense generosity in offering assistance with substantive research and opportunities to debrief. The relationships I have forged while doing this research work, and the knowledge that I am contributing to something greater, have made it a worthwhile and enriching experience.

I feel a great sense of responsibility being entrusted with this task. I hope that my efforts are a fitting tribute to the experiences of Survivors and a contribution to a future where such injustices are not allowed to happen again.

REMEMBER ME - PORTRAITS OF SURVIVAL

In late 2015, we were delighted to learn that Katherine Griffith’s portrait of Holocaust Survivor, Olga Horak OAM, had been selected as a finalist in the 2016 National Photographic Portrait Prize. This is an annual event designed to promote the very best in Australian contemporary photographic portraiture.

The image had initially been commissioned by the Marketing Department as part of a wider series showcasing the Survivors, alongside the objects they had donated to the Museum.

Once developed, we realised that the images far outweighed their intended purpose, bearing witness to astonishing and intimate reunions. In captivating detail, the camera captured the strength, rawness and sensitivities of the individual Survivor as they were reunited with the physical evidence of a past traumatic experience. Many had not held the items in question for over twenty years.

In Olga’s portrait, we notice the sharp contrasts between the two textiles in the picture: the loveliness of the handmade dress that helped to define Olga’s post-war identity as a blouse-manufacturer, and the visceral, jarring image of the blanket, which covered her skeletal frame while in Bergen-Belsen.

SJM Curator Roslyn Sugarman hopes to mount an exhibition showcasing this image and others at the Museum in November. If you would like to help the Museum to realise this goal please contact Rita Prager via communityliaison@sjm.com.au or call 02 8036 0115.
**PUBLIC PROGRAMS** - Aviva Wolff, Public Program Chair

The Museum Public Programs continue to be diverse and entertaining and draw large audiences. In brief below are some of the excellent events recently hosted;

‘Reading Between the Lines’, was an outstanding event held in November. People from all walks of life read letters received during times of conflict (WWI & WWII, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Lindt café siege). Each submission was moving and heartfelt and the audience was captivated.

The Anne Frank exhibition launch was powerful, informative and included a reading by 12 year old Saskia Auerbach and music by a string quartet. Professor Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimlett launched a book written by Dr Avril Alba about the importance of Holocaust Museums. Professor Garry Walter gave an excellent presentation on the book he wrote about his grandfather’s life entitled ‘Unfathomable Journeys’.

Together with the Australian Institute of Holocaust and Genocide Studies, we linked with the First International Day of Commemoration of the Victims of Genocide. Featured speakers were Helen Vatsikopoulos, an award winning journalist and Paul Drexler, a child Holocaust Survivor.

We hosted a most poignant event entitled ‘Uncovering Otto: The Lost Letters of Otto Frank’. Anne Slade spoke about her search for the girls from Australia who had corresponded with Otto Frank. Diana Munro, one of the correspondents, gave an inspiring talk and there was a re-enactment of the correspondence between Otto and Anne Finlayson.

Do not miss an upcoming event on 22 May entitled ‘Me, Myself and Anne’, a satellite event of the Sydney Writer’s Festival. Well known authors and journalists including Jackie French, Geraldine Doogue, Mia Freedman, Kerri Sackville and Joanna Fedler will discuss the penmanship of Anne Frank and read excerpts from her diary.

For more event information please visit the Museum website. sydneyjewishmuseum.com.au

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**MEDICAL SYMPOSIUM** - Ilana McCorquodale, Professional Education

Recently the Museum held an inaugural symposium for the people in the medical profession. ‘Medical Ethics in the Shadow of the Holocaust’ was a partnership with the Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine and proved to be a resounding success.

A series of guest speakers delivered an excellent range of presentations, reflecting the breadth of interests and expertise brought to the day by the interdisciplinary group of contributors. It enabled thoughtful deliberations on challenging medical ethical issues from historical, philosophical, sociological, political, legal and human rights perspectives.

Throughout the day, the Holocaust was appropriately central to the symposium in terms of the presentations, panels, and the Museum tour. Audience members also had the opportunity to dialogue with Holocaust Survivors through a conversation-style session ‘Witnessing and Reflecting on Trauma.’

The lively and engaging day was attended by a widely diverse group of people, most of whom had not previously visited the Museum.

In terms of indicators of the success of the day, the events generated vigorous debate and discussion. There was very positive feedback received about the symposium and the desire to have similar activities in future.

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Members of the organising committee: Ilana McCorquodale, Dr Edwina Light, Professor Angus Dawson and Professor Garry Walter AM.

Dr Diana Munro, Anne Slade, Anne Finlayson and Levien Rouw, Head of Educational Projects at the Anne Frank House at the Otto Frank Letter Reading Event.
Joanna Auerbach and daughter Saskia at the launch of the Anne Frank Exhibition.

Museum Vice-President Roma Shell with Holocaust Survivor Marianne Van Der Poorten and her daughter Rose Fekete at the launch of the Anne Frank Exhibition.

Holocaust Survivors Paul Drexler, Francine Lazarus, Eddie Jaku OAM and George Sternfeld at the launch of the Anne Frank Exhibition.

Museum volunteers Rita Nash and Mary Zeigler at the launch of the Anne Frank Exhibition.

CEO Norman Seligman with Richard Prasquier, French Jewish Communal Leader and past President of the Council of French Jewish Institutions.

Lorand Loblay and Museum Development Director Robert Schneider at the ceremony celebrating the dedication of the Museum Cafe in loving memory of Mr Loblay’s late parents.

Professor Gus Lehrer AM FAA, Natalie and Adam Lippmann at the dedication of the Mark and Anna Reznik Centre of Learning.

Author Julie Kohner with Museum volunteer Stella Dvuchbabny. Julie spoke to Museum volunteers about the portrayal of Holocaust Survivors on American television in the early 1950s.
Holocaust Survivors, Museum volunteers and staff celebrate at the Museum’s regular ‘Birthday Club’.

Demographer and statistician Sergio Della Pergola spoke to a Museum audience.

Mandelbaum Visiting Scholar, Dr Alina Grossman, following her lecture at the Museum.

Holocaust Survivor Yvonne Engelman shares her testimony as part of the Remember Me Program.

Holocaust Survivors, Museum volunteers and staff celebrate at the Museum’s regular ‘Birthday Club’.

Holocaust Survivor Francine Lazarus with her husband Phillip following her Remember Me talk.

Tanya Haber and Lindt Cafe siege Survivor Louisa Hope at the ‘Reading Between the Lines’ event.

Caroline Saul, her mother and son at the Reading Between the Lines event.

Holocaust Survivors Ana and Gabby De Leon at the Volunteer end of year party.

Holocaust Survivors Margot Tischmann and Sam Young at the Volunteer end of year party.
Sydney Jewish Museum at the Montefiore

In March we continued our successful Museum @ Monte morning teas. This event takes place quarterly, and allows Museum staff to catch up with former and current volunteers who now reside at the Monte in Randwick. Together, we celebrate recent birthdays and share Museum news and highlights. We look forward to hosting this program once again in June, September and December this year.

Membership

Over the next two months, we will be sending out renewal notices for annual membership. Museum membership is important. Not only does it foster a sense of community, but it is a vital source of income and assists us when applying for project funding.

Sanctum of Remembrance

The Sanctum of Remembrance pays tribute to the memory of the six million martyrs and heroes, those who survived the Shoah but are no longer with us, as well as honouring the Righteous Among the Nations. The Sanctum is currently closed due to renovations. We apologise for the inconvenience and will advise when it is once again open to the public.

This year the Sanctum of Remembrance ‘Reading of the Names’ ceremony will take place at the Museum on Sunday 11th September 2016 at 11am.

As part of the Museum’s objective of honouring victims and Survivors of the Holocaust, we encourage the community to dedicate plaques in our Sanctum of Remembrance.

If you would like to discuss dedicating a plaque in honour of your loved ones, please contact Rita Prager on 02 9360 7999 or email: communityliaison@sjm.com.au.

We thank those Museum members and donors who have dedicated plaques in the past year.

In 2015, the Museum introduced 25,000 school students to Jewish history and culture. A major gift or bequest will help sustain and develop these programs.

For a confidential discussion about how you can help, contact Rob Schneider on 02 9360 7999 or email rschneider@sjm.com.au.

BECOME A MUSEUM MEMBER TODAY. VISIT SYDNEYJEWISHMUSEUM.COM.AU