

**OPENING REMARKS MADE BY ROMAN KENT**  
**CHAIRMAN, AMERICAN GATHERING OF JEWISH HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS**  
**TEACHERS CONFERENCE HELD IN WASHINGTON, DC. - FEBRUARY, 2010**

TRADITION!!! TRADITION!!!

The participants of our first Alumni Conference may remember that when Professor Wayman delivered his lecture, he first told us an amusing anecdote to help us, as he said, “Digest and absorb the study of the Holocaust”. Since then, I have followed in his footsteps and today will be no exception.

When I came to these United States in 1946, long before any one of you was born, I landed in Atlanta, Georgia, and that is where I went to school and where I learned my English with my very pronounced – “southern drawl”. While studying English, we had to take English literature, and of course we had to study the writings of William Shakespeare.

For me, as you can well understand, it was hard enough to follow plain, common everyday English – but Shakespeare! Well that was another matter. But *volens nolen*<sup>1</sup>s, I had no choice. So I dug in and tried to absorb the thoughts and beauty of Shakespeare’s expressions.

Our first class discussion about Shakespeare proceeded on a scholarly basis until a charming young co-ed, when confronted with the question “what do you think about Shakespeare?” replied as follows: “As far as I’m concerned Professor, what Shakespeare did is really nothing unusual. After all, all he did was put the famous quotations together!”

Dear Teachers ... As I speak to you today, you should know that I do not speak to you as a historian, as an educator, or as a teacher – but as a parent, a survivor and a grandparent. I feel humble, so very humble, in the presence of all of you who are so totally and emotionally dedicated day in and day out to the teaching of the Holocaust and the Jewish resistance.

You as teachers, whether you admit it or not, have a special relationship with children which no parent, regardless of how much they love their child, can have. This cannot be taken away from you. There is no question that to parents their children are special and precious. But for us survivors, they are even more precious, since most of our families were decimated during the Holocaust. For us, children are our future. For us, they are our continuity. For us, they are the continuity of the Jewish people and that of mankind.

In the last few years, we have been fascinated by the extraordinary developments that are taking place in the world at large. The radical changes -- social, political and economic are considered by many as almost a modern miracle. Yet, when we look closely at these changes, and I am glad that they have taken place, there is an air, an atmosphere that might bring forth the dormant seeds of anti-Semitism and new waves of denial and revision of the Holocaust.

So when I look at you and assess the work you do, to me you are the symbol and the fact that the history of the Holocaust can and must be taught to all students in public schools. Yes, it must be taught to all students who live far away from Europe, and far removed from the Jewish experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Latin. Whether willing or unwilling.

Each day you prove again and again that the story of the Holocaust can be effectively told to youngsters, and the events grasped by students of diverse backgrounds and abilities. It is most important for us to concentrate on the children, since although the event you teach about pertains primarily to the Jewish people, it has universal implications that have become the central defining experience of twentieth century humanity. For the Holocaust is not only Jewish history, it is human history, and universal history.

Thus, when you teach the children, the new generation of future leaders, you can be proud it is you who are now inspiring them to be a moral and humane force, a force to be reckoned with. And when you teach and mold the minds of your students, remember what is considered to be some of the most important aspects of the awesome experience called the Holocaust.

And when you teach, do not, I beg you do not, focus your studies on victims and killers only. You must present the victims as people. For not only are their deaths of significance, but the quality of their lives, the values they affirmed, the traditions they cherished, must be remembered as well.

And you must teach your students about our resistance and defiance ... of the human capacity for evil as well as for goodness, and of the human capacity to endure and survive.

And you must teach the children never, never to allow the exploitation, trivialization, and commercialization of the word and the memory of the Holocaust.

Yes, you must also teach the children about the Righteous Gentiles. Although there were so few of them, each one of the Righteous Gentiles who saved a Jewish life now shines like the brightest star. For these special individuals reaffirmed human dignity in a world that desecrated all values.

And, therefore, you must teach the children to never, never be a bystander!

In spite of the atrocities that were perpetrated against mankind during the Holocaust, I attempted to teach my own children to believe in the goodness and dignity of man, and to make sure their actions and deeds will leave the world a somewhat better place to live for the generations to come. That was my task, and I have only two children. I can only imagine how much more difficult a task it is for you teachers with so many children under your wing.

To help you my dear colleagues, I pledge my full support.

Roman Kent  
Chairman, American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors

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It has been twenty five years since a few of us started the Teachers' Program on Holocaust and Jewish Resistance. Under the guiding eyes and strong will of our Chairperson, Vladka Meed, the modest program began with about twenty teachers from the State of New York. Today, our program consists of approximately one thousand graduate teachers representing all states in our great country.

Over the years, we travelled to both Poland and Israel to acquire knowledge on the subject. As a matter of fact, this year's group of teachers will even travel to Germany and visit the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and also a Museum renovated under the watchful eyes of the President of the American Gathering, Sam Bloch.

It is somewhat strange and awkward for me to be the one standing on the podium today to address you. In the past, it has always been our custom for Vladka Meed to appear before you on this happy occasion. Although she is somewhat indisposed and unable to travel to be with us today, I sense her presence and feel she is at my side standing next to me, just as she has for the past twenty five years.

So with just a little imagination, kindly visualize Vladka standing next to me. She would be addressing you with her stern voice, which of course no one can duplicate. I most certainly will not even try.