

## **BAILIFF'S ADDRESS AT HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY**

Wednesday 27th January 2010

1. The theme for this year's Holocaust Memorial Day is entitled "The Legacy of Hope". A dictionary definition of hope is 'a belief in a positive outcome' or alternatively 'the feeling that is wanted can be had or that events will turn out for the best'. Given the mass slaughter and other horrific events which took place during the Holocaust, this would seem on the face of it to be a theme which requires some thought and explanation. After all, the most obvious legacy of the events of the Holocaust is the immense suffering inflicted on so many, including survivors who lost all the other members of their family, and realisation of the ease with which evil can flourish and engulf whole swathes of a population.
2. However, on closer analysis, I think that it is possible to draw hope from what occurred in a number of ways. In the first place, although so many looked the other way whilst genocide was taking place, there were those who sought to do what they could to save the lives of people who would otherwise have been killed, often at great risk to themselves.

3. I would like to take a few moments to speak of a couple of examples. As I have said previously, I think that telling stories of particular individuals helps to bring to life the horrors of events which took place nearly seventy years ago.
  
4. The first is the well known story of “Miep Gies (Meep Khees”) who died last year aged 100. She was the person who Otto Frank asked in July 1942 to help hide his family in the secret hideout at the top of the canal side building in Amsterdam that housed the Frank family business. She agreed to help without hesitation and she and her husband and four others helped the Franks and the other people in the hideout to evade the Gestapo by bringing food, supplies and news of the outside world to them. Miep cycled round the city alternating grocers in order to ward off suspicions concerning the amount of supplies which she was purchasing. When the Frank family were betrayed in 1944 and sent to concentration camps, she went back to the premises and gathered up the scattered pages of what turned out to be the diary that Ann Frank had been writing.
  
5. A measure of her character can be obtained from her comments when she was asked, many years later, whether she would agree to being made a character study of heroism for the young. She resisted this. *“I don’t want to be considered a hero”* she said. *“Young people would grow up with the feeling that you have to be a hero to do your human duty. I am afraid nobody would*

*ever help other people, because who is a hero? I was not. I was just an ordinary housewife and secretary.”*

6. The second is the story of Roman Halter. He was 12 when Hitler’s troops invaded Poland. He was the youngest of 7 children of Jewish parents and the family lived in a town called Chodecz. Immediately after the invasion the leaders of the community, both Jewish and Polish were taken away and shot. All the able bodied Jewish men and women were then taken away as forced labour. By 1940, 360 Jews were left in the town as compared with some 800 who had lived there at the time of the invasion.
  
7. In the autumn of 1940 they were all moved to the ghetto in the city of Lodz but the ghetto was very full and could only accommodate 120. The remainder were taken away and shot. Roman’s grandfather, to whom he was very close, only survived some 2 months in the ghetto but he told Roman that when he survived – not if he survived but when – he must tell the world that the Nazis were murdering all the Jewish people. As early as October 1940 the grandfather had understood the importance of this. Roman has said that his grandfather’s words helped him to survive. He believed what his grandfather had said to him and it gave him hope.
  
8. The terrible conditions in the various ghettos have been well recorded and I do not need to remind you of them today. Roman’s father died of starvation in the

spring of 1941 and in spring 1942, Roman, his mother, his sister and her 2 children were all selected to be taken to Chelmno concentration camp. His mother told him to hide until the selection from the ghetto was over and this he managed to do. But his mother, his sister and her children were taken to the camp and all perished there. Roman remained in the ghetto working in a metal factory until the autumn of 1944 when the 500 people who worked in the factory were moved to Auschwitz-Birkenau together with 2300 other people from the ghetto. At Auschwitz the 500 metal workers were put to work but the 2300 were led to the gas chambers.

9. I shall not go into the detail of the conditions which Roman and so many others suffered at that terrible camp, but there came a time when he was moved to work in Dresden and then in March 1945 they were taken on one of the notorious death marches. Roman and a number of others realised that their usefulness as workers had come to an end and they were likely to be shot. Accordingly they decided to escape on the third night of their march. When daylight came they had to take shelter and 3 of them were taken in by a German couple called Kurt and Hertha Fuchs. Mr and Mrs Fuchs looked after the 3 of them for weeks at great risk to themselves. On 4th May 1945 Roman had a vivid dream in which his grandfather told him to go back to Chodecz. The next morning he told Mr and Mrs Fuchs and his 2 friends that he was going to do that. They thought he was mad as the war was about to end. Indeed Russian troops had already passed through the village. Nevertheless

Roman decided to go and eventually he reached Chodecz, which was some 460km from Dresden. It turned out that out of the 800 Jewish people who had lived there in 1939, only 4 had survived. He asked himself why he was one of them and concluded that his grandfather's words had played a very important part in his survival. He did not receive a friendly reception in Chodecz so he went to Prague and there, through the good offices of the Red Cross, managed to get some food parcels which he decided to take back to Mr and Mrs Fuchs by way of thank you. When he arrived there Mrs Fuchs was dressed in black. It transpired that 5 days after Roman had left, local men who had been in the SS during the war had learned that Mr and Mrs Fuchs had sheltered Jews. Even though the war was over by then they had come and taken Mr Fuchs and Roman's 2 friends to a nearby field where they had shot and killed Mr Fuchs and 1 of his friends. If Roman had not had that dream in which his grandfather spoke to him and he had not acted on it, he too would almost certainly have been killed.

10. Many years later Roman returned to Dresden and went with a television crew to see Mrs Fuchs, who by then was in her early 90s. I take the following from Roman's own words:- *"I asked her why she had taken in and sheltered the 3 of us. She paid for it so very dearly with the death of her husband Kurt and we had nothing to give her but our thanks. She answered that both she and her husband felt they had to do it. 'You see' she said 'Although we are Germans, we were not Nazis; our minds were not poisoned by the 12 years of*

*propaganda, and all the Nazi screechings against the Jews. It was our impulse to do this, to take you in and save you. You would do the same I think, Roman”.*

11. *I replied that after the wonderful example that she and Kurt had shown I would like to think that I would do the same. But I know that it is easier to say yes than to do it. I often ask myself if I would have the courage, the sense of what is right and what is wrong, the humanity, to take in strangers and to save them, when such an act was punishable by death for all. I would like to believe that I would.”*

12. That is a question we can all ask ourselves. There are 2 kinds of hope, I think, in Roman’s story. The first is the hope that Roman’s grandfather’s words gave him and which he felt helped him to survive, as they gave him the belief that he would survive and the determination to try and make it happen. Secondly, there is the hope to be drawn from the actions of people such as Mr and Mrs Fuchs who put the saving of the lives of others ahead of the risk to themselves. And of course there were brave people in Jersey as well who hid escaped slave workers and helped others at great risk to themselves.

13. But the main legacy of hope that can be drawn from the Holocaust is that, by ensuring that we remind ourselves frequently of the horrors that took place, we help to try and ensure that such events do not occur again.

14. Sometimes, it is hard to be optimistic. We have seen acts of genocide more recently in places such as Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo and Darfur to name but some. However, although it is sometimes agonisingly slow and fitful, there is progress. The spotlight of the world's media brings such events to public attention in a way that did not happen during the Holocaust and pressure can therefore be brought to bear. Secondly, courts have been established to bring to justice those who have orchestrated such acts and we have seen prosecutions in relation to events in Rwanda, Bosnia and Kosovo. Hopefully, slowly but surely, the message will get through that there is no hiding place for such people.

15. It is 65 years to the day since the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp was liberated. In my view it is a cause for optimism that, far from the events of the Holocaust fading into history, interest in what occurred remains high. I believe that Holocaust Memorial Day has played a part in this. It is interesting to note that the number of people visiting the Auschwitz Memorial in 2009 was a record. The number has increased from approximately 400,000 in the year 2000 to 1.3 million in 2009. The majority of visitors, some 820,000 in 2009, are young people, including pupils and students. The record number of visitors and the fact that so many are young is, I believe, a hopeful sign that people really do wish to learn the lessons of the past.

16. We shall shortly be moving outside to remember the 22 victims of the Holocaust from Jersey. By recalling the ultimate price which they paid, let us look forward with hope and renewed determination that the attitudes which allowed the Holocaust to occur should never take hold again.