

CROCKETT HIGH SCHOOLERS MOVED BY HOLOCAUST EXHIBIT

By Ron Barry

"I am amazed at how people could find love in such a harsh place."

Those are the words of Crockett County high schooler Bianca Crawford, one of several students noticeably touched by the recent traveling exhibit in the CCHS library of "Spots of Light: To Be a Woman in the Holocaust," a display on loan from the American Society for Yad Vashem, and created and developed by Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center.

The exhibit, a series of panels which spotlight the unique voice of women during the Holocaust, was exhibited in the high school library from November 7 to 17 by the special arrangement of Crockett history teacher Deborah Puckett, who also serves as an ambassador for the Tennessee Holocaust Commission.

"It's highly important that our students are informed about this atrocity in the world's history," Puckett said. "Especially with the recent rise in anti-Semitic events going on in America today, they need to know the history behind it and why this is still such an important issue."

Puckett coordinated the Crockett showing of the display with the assistance of Marlene W. Yahalom, PhD, Director of Education of the American Society for Yad Vashem, and herself a child and grandchild of six Holocaust survivors. Puckett said the exhibit was viewed by the school district's Board of Education and their guests, as well as by about 320 high school students. The materials are copyrighted and are highly protected by Yad Vashem, so no close-up photography or reproductions of the individual poster boards are permitted.

Approximately six million Jews - at the time representing about two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population - were systematically murdered between the years of 1939 and 1945 as Nazi Germany and its allies carried out their genocide during World War II. The "Spots of Light" exhibit features heroic examples of how women coped with the various facets of their persecution, displaying tremendous courage, and spreading hope among the extermination camps, even though most eventually experienced death themselves.



Above: Students quoted in the story (from left): Bianca Crawford, Cadie Loggins, and Sophie Hatcher.

Some of the Crockett students' reactions validated Puckett's efforts to bring the display to the school.

Crawford was particularly moved by the fact that many couples met and married in the camps, even though they knew death could come at any day.

"The conditions were so harsh and the treatment so terrible that to be able to find love in that environment is just amazing," she said.

Sophie Hatcher's favorite story was about a woman who was just a general caregiver until she managed to escape being rounded up into a camp. The woman - Fannie Solomian - managed to teach herself surgical techniques and became the "doctor" for all the others who needed medical attention.

"That she could give hope to so many others in that situation is so uplifting," Hatcher said.

Another student, Cadie Loggins, was intrigued by the prisoners' resourcefulness. "They would develop creative uses for almost anything they could find on the ground," she said. "They found some way to use almost everything they could get in their hands. Sometimes it was for clothing, sometimes maybe to write something, sometimes as a utensil."

Crawford said it was important for her generation to learn these things in a time in which some adults in the divisive political atmosphere we're in - who command much of the media attention - openly deny and distort historical facts that are evidence that the Holocaust even occurred.

"I think this is potentially devastating," she said. "It's like the saying goes: Those who deny history are doomed to repeat it. With the current situation in the Middle East, deniers could trigger something like this happening again."

Crawford also remembered reading The Diary of Anne Frank earlier in her schooling but thinking it may have had some of the more gruesome details removed.

"I don't recall her really dwelling on the brutality of it all," she said. "But now we've been reading Night by Elie Wiesel, and he actually witnessed hangings and other atrocities that are all detailed." Night is Wiesel's 1960 memoir based on his Holocaust experiences with his father in the Nazi German concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald in 1944-1945. He saw his family members murdered and is its lone survivor.

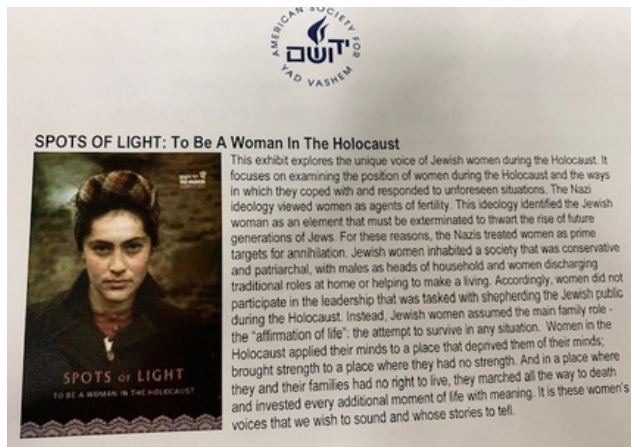
Hatcher thinks the Holocaust lessons mean even more now that Israel is at war with Hamas. She favors Israel's right to defend itself because of her biblical beliefs but acknowledges that many young people who don't know the history of anti-Semitism have trouble evaluating innocent collateral victims of the warfare.

Regarding the Holocaust itself, Puckett is particularly mindful of the group known as the Righteous Among the Nations, who were non-Jews who took great risks to save Jews during the Holocaust. Rescue took many forms and the "Righteous" came from different nations, religions, and walks of life. What they had in common was that they protected their Jewish neighbors at a time when hostility and indifference prevailed, whether hiding them in their homes and properties, providing them with false papers and identification, or literally smuggling them to escape. These acts of bravery and courage were done at great risk to the "Righteous"- they would face the death penalty if they were caught saving Jewish lives.

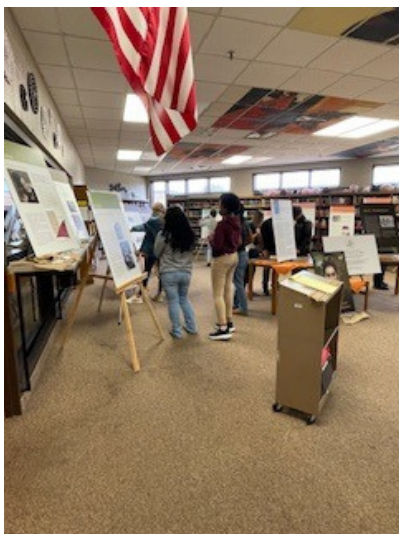


Above: The centerpiece of the display, as set up in the CCHS Library from November 7th to 17th.

Below: A summary of the "Spots of Light" exhibit.



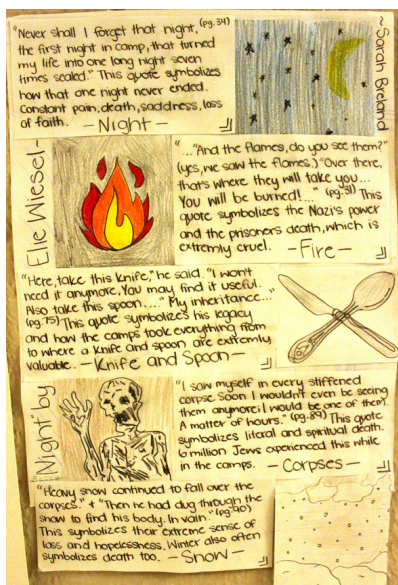
Yad Vashem honors any individual whose efforts in this vein are reliably documented, and Puckett believes it to be one of the most fascinating aspects of the entire period. She hopes to be able to bring similar exhibits to Crockett County in the future to ensure that her students are sufficiently informed about historical events before they exit into the adult world.



Above: Students viewing the display.



Left: The full library layout of the exhibit.



Right: A related class featured students making collages citing the significance of certain passages from Elie Wiesel's "Night." Here's an example...

Right: ... and here's another one.

