

Professor Deborah Lipstad's HISTORY ON TRIAL

Holocaust Commemoration Lecture at Cedars-Sinai Hospital

By Ari Bussel

More than 25 years I live in Los Angeles. The Star of David on the East and West sides of Cedars-Sinai Medical Center always say hello, but I am not sure I know to articulate what makes the hospital "Jewish." Possibly the Mezuzah at the entrance to each room? Anyone who spent any length of time at the emergency room or in one of the other departments will attest that the population being treated as is diverse as the melting pot we call Los Angeles.

One thing that makes Cedars unique among all the hospitals in the USA is an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day Memorial. It is also the only hospital with a Holocaust Memorial (on the Plaza Level). Cedars, according to Dr. Joel Geiderman, the Co-Chairman of the Department of Emergency Medicine, has the privilege to care to a disproportionate number of survivors. Addressing an audience of some 250, mostly faculty and staff, Dr. Geiderman reminded those on the faculty to "take a few minutes to listen to their patients' stories. It is the duty of each of us not to forget."

Dr. Geiderman also serves as the Vice-Chairman of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. His next message was "Silence only encourages the perpetrators." We need to listen, so that we will know, we must not forget, and we must not go silent.

Cedars not only treats Holocaust survivors, it also has a great number of volunteers who are survivors. Six such volunteers were asked to lit a candle. Following the candle lighting ceremony, a keynote address was given by Prof. Deborah Lipstadt.

It was 20 years ago that I took a course on Jewish Studies at UCLA. The professor was redheaded, very knowledgeable in Judaism – fluent in both its historical and religious aspects – her enthusiasm contagious. Imparting knowledge of a subject matter close to her heart made us – students from all walks of life – eager to learn, thirsty for more. It was twenty years ago, the world was different. The subject matter did not raise as much hatred and contention as it does nowadays. UCLA then was a safe environment where a person could study a subject matter, removed from the very strong anti-Semitic stance disguised as anti-Israel sentiment so prevalent today.

I took time off work mid-day Friday, April 13, to hear this Holocaust commemoration lecture by Prof. Deborah Lipstadt. The years have been kind to Prof. Lipstadt – she has not changed much (nor did she remember me among the many thousands of students she had). The image imprinted twenty years ago did not fade, and accurately describes Prof. Lipstadt of 2007: En energetic, very well spoken speaker, versed in both history and religion.

Prof. Lipstadt's clarity of thought translates to a clarity of expression. Her latest book, HISTORY ON TRIAL, MY DAY IN COURT WITH A HOLOCAUST DENIER, starts with a quote from Deuteronomy 4:9:

But take utmost care, so that you do not forget the things that you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your mind as long as you live. And teach them to your children and your children's children. (Deuteronomy 4:9).

Following the publication of her two other books (Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory and Beyond Belief: The American Press &

the Coming of the Holocaust 1933-1945), Prof. Lipstadt is recognized as one of the most powerful voices in exposing Holocaust denial, using true scholarship as a weapon in her aid.

Prof. Lipstadt was sued by Holocaust denier David Irving in British courts for

While the quotes are correct, this seemingly "innocent" transposition gave a different impression of what truly went on. Another example is Hitler's removing a Nazi officer from the party after a raid on a Jewish delicatessen in which Jews were killed. Irving presents it as an example of Hitler's "con-

lated. Luckily, Prof. Lipstadt's employer, Emory University, backed her up completely, allowing her to continue in her position of a Professor of Modern Jewish and Holocaust Studies, paying a full salary for part time teaching. Emory University's position was that one day they will want to say that "courses on the Holocaust were being taught at Emory continuously while Deborah Lipstadt was on trial." Please visit Emory's Holocaust Denial on Trial's website: www.HDOT.org.

Among the various sources of strength that held her throughout the trial: family, friends and colleagues, the Jewish community, the survivors who came in droves saying "we are still here," "remember and do not forget!" and Jewish tradition and values. For it may have been someone else, but who knows if her whole life was not a path which prepared her for this task, for that moment in history, for achieving a truly amazing verdict.

Prof. Lipstadt ended her lecture, before a mesmerized audience of 250, reading the following portion from pp. 289-290 of her book:

For a long time after the court battle was over, I felt pain when I thought of the many people who had watched Irving ravage their memories. I could not fathom what it felt like to have one's experiences not just denied, but deprecated and ridiculed. However, I felt not just pain, but also a certain sense of privilege. I was reminded of the fact that Jewish tradition highly values acts of loving-kindness, including visiting the sick, sheltering the needy, feeding the hungry, and welcoming the stranger. There is, however, one act of loving-kindness that supersedes all the others because it cannot be reciprocated. Taking care of the dead is called hesed shel emet, the most genuine act of loving-kindness, because it is then that we most closely emulate God's kindness to humans, which also cannot be reciprocated. For five years I had the privilege to do hesed shel emet, to stand up for those who did not survive or who could not stand up for themselves. Being able to do that was thanks enough.

I did not choose this field of research in order to perform this act of hesed. I did not write my book on deniers expecting to engage in this act. I did not choose this fight. But now, as I look back, I am filled with gratitude. If someone had to be taken out of the line to fight this battle, I feel gratified to have been the one.

Prof. Lipstadt, on this Holocaust Remembrance Day, 62 years after the end of WWII, we – the living, the next generation of the Holocaust survivors – thank you.

For the complete story of her journey, please check out *History on Trial* by Professor Deborah Lipstadt.

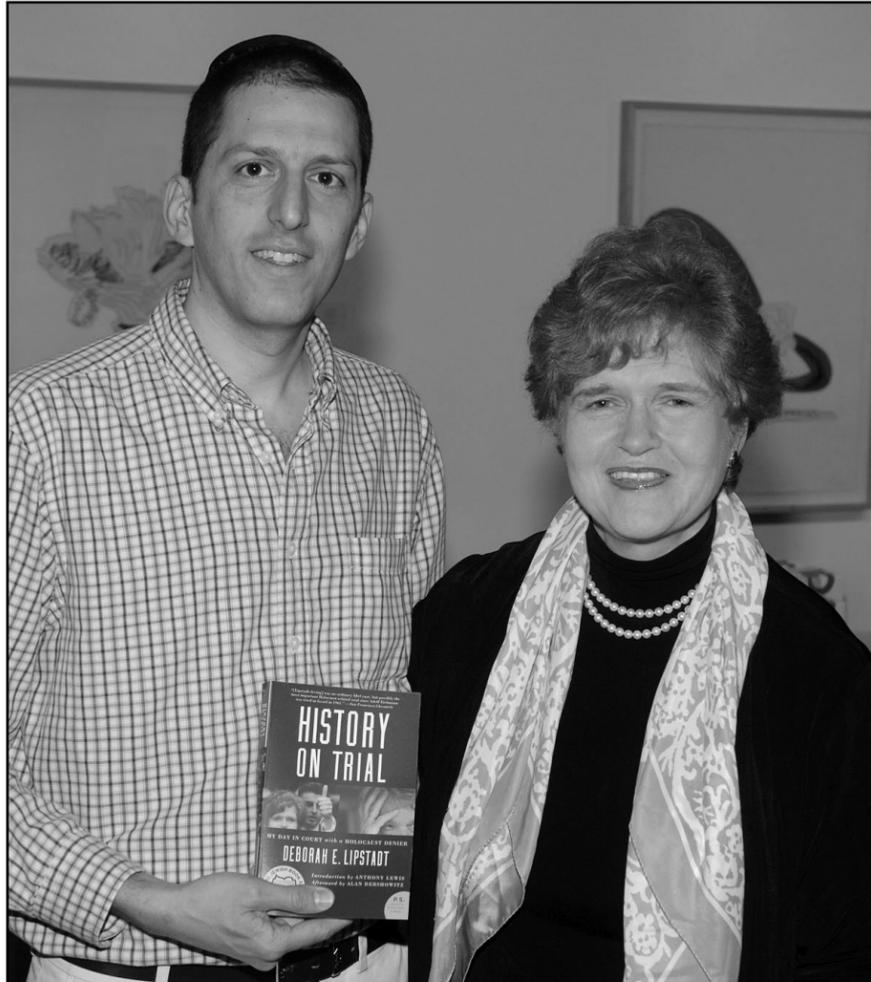


photo: Thomas Neerken

Ari Bussel holding HISTORY ON TRIAL with Prof. Deborah Lipstadt.

libel. The burden of proof lies, according to British law, on the defendant – in this case Prof. Lipstadt. She realized she "could not sit idle, but had to fight!" For over three years, Prof. Lipstadt did nothing else but engaged in her defense, soon turning the tables, showing Irving was both a Holocaust Denier and a Racist, and was finally vindicated.

The essence of Irving's arguments (which he makes or repeats) is that there was no overall plan to kill the Jews. There was no state-sponsored genocide, no murder program, no plan, no road-to-action.

Prof. Lipstadt is not a daughter of survivors, but she became the representative of so many survivors who are still alive and a spokesperson for family members of numerous others who have perished. One survivor came to her, extended her hand, rolled up her sleeve and showed the number engraved on her arm. She said "You are fighting for us." Prof. Lipstadt heard "This is really important; do not mess it up!" Another survivor brought a list of people, all with the same last name, each with a date of birth, some with a date of death others with a question mark. The person refused to take back the list. She said: "This is My Evidence, You Must Take It."

Prof. Lipstadt decided not to put the Holocaust on trial by having to prove it happened. Rather, she and her defense team attacked every instance in which Irving, a prolific writer, made false and misleading references to the Holocaust. In one instance, for example, he reverses what Hitler said in a two day conference, bringing first what was said on the second day, followed by what was said of the first day.

cern" for the Jews. The truth was strikingly different. In a testimony given by a Nazi sympathizer about said party, we learn that Hitler called the officer during the party and ordered him removed from the Nazi Party NOT BECAUSE of the raid or the killing of the Jews – these were not the issue. Rather, the officer removed the Nazi Party's insignia before the raid. For this lack of moral courage Hitler removed him. Yet a third way Irving twists the truth is by presenting "facts" which one would not notice to be falsehoods unless one studies them very carefully.

For the duration of the trial, Prof. Lipstadt was prohibited from talking to the press. This presented a double hardship for a person who speaks so well in public: She had to fight both the urge to tell the truth and being told not to do something. "To me, to keep silent at any time is an unnatural act, especially when someone tells me to keep quiet." This forced silence translated into her gift to us in HISTORY ON TRIAL.

We have witnessed in recent years the (ab)use of using the legal system as a deterrent of free speech. Lawsuits engage a person, depleting his time and resources. Long an effective weapon in France, it has now migrated into the USA. Most recently, known counter terrorism expert Steve Emerson has been sued and the civilians on board the US Airways flight have been named in a lawsuit relating to the six "Imams." Irving's lawsuit may have been different, but not less calcu-

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may we get to celebrate many more joyous
occasions in the future together.

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