

## MEMORY RECONSTRUCTION PROJECT: Honouring JHC volunteers and their survivor families

The week that Lori and Neil Shocket came to town, armed with scissors and brimming with creativity and positive energy, was one of the most memorable times I have had during the many years I have worked at the JHC.

The idea was so simple that I contemplated just stealing it and doing it ourselves. But we would have been so much poorer if we had taken that path. Lori is an artist with a vision and it is her driving force that gives this project its special quality.

When we first announced the workshops it didn't sound like much: create collages to honour survivors in their family. However when you walked into the auditorium full of families working with facilitators, you sensed that this was really special. There you would see small family groups, each crowded around a table, totally focussed on their own photos, documents and memories. There was a buzz in the room; it was serious, purposeful and powerful. And each group seemed almost oblivious to the others around them, so intense was their dedication to their own collage.

One of the most striking aspects was the opportunity to see firsthand all of these remarkable photos and documents. Much time was spent at the photocopy machine, resizing these incredible images. And while the focus was on getting the image to the right size, you were constantly taken aback by the beauty of the pre- and post-war family photos, the power of the hand-writing on old letters and sometimes shocked by the contents on official documents from the war period.

Those fortunate to have the survivors work with them were able to witness the pride these survivors felt when the task was finished. And those that no longer have their survivor relative with them felt a completely different sense of achievement when gazing at their completed collage. For both groups the feeling at the end was affirming, sensing that these individual stories of survival have been documented and will live on.

I think what I found most heartening about the project is that ultimately everyone got the opportunity to be an artist, to express themselves in a way most have not previously tried. We all feel the need to remember our family's Holocaust experiences so it was a privilege to be able to honour and cherish these memories, with family, to create something unique together.

The other great outcome of this project was the enthusiasm and dedication of the people who enlisted as workshop facilitators. We had a number of new volunteers sign up, and a number of younger ones too, which was very pleasing to see. Also great thanks to the staff members who volunteered as facilitators. And each facilitator approached each collage with a great deal of respect and sensitivity, knowing that they are stepping into another family's private and difficult space.

Special thanks to Lori and Neil Shocket for being such wonderful people to work with and so hard working as well, to Anatie Livnat for co-ordinating it, to Rae Silverstein, for all the leg work convincing people to get on board and to Anna Hirsh for photographing each finished collage. And as always, thanks to all staff and volunteers who assisted to make this the great success it was.

Please visit the Human element project website to check out your collage <http://www.thehumanelementproject.com/> – it should be there. Please advise me of any corrections to the text or spellings of names etc.

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