

**LAUNCH OF *THE WORDS TO REMEMBER IT***  
**BY THE HONOURABLE J J SPIGELMAN AC**  
**CHIEF JUSTICE OF NEW SOUTH WALES**  
**AT THE SYDNEY JEWISH MUSEUM**  
**SYDNEY, 24 MAY 2009<sup>1</sup>**

Accepting this invitation didn't take any time, because it was so obvious I had to do it. This is the community that nurtured me. These are the people, many of them friends of my late mother and father, with whom I grew up and with whom I became involved in many activities in this community.

No one in this room needs to be told of the horror and the tragedy of the Holocaust. It was the defining moral event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Virtually everyone in this room was personally touched, either directly or indirectly, by those events. The significance of remembrance is now well established, at least to people such as us. It is not always so well established to others. Whilst it may be true that, for many, there is a certain amount of overload on the subject of the Holocaust, nevertheless, it is theme that repeats itself again and again. We cannot leave it alone because of the extraordinary range of human characteristics, ranging from satanic evil on the one hand to the most self-denying personal altruism on the other, which it evoked.

In the stories collected in this volume, taken together, you have many examples of that full range of human characteristics. There are people who committed acts which are outrageously, extraordinarily, difficult to understand.

There are people who acted on the basis of cupidity, others from fear for their own safety, and others who took risks with their own safety on the basis of a strong moral stance. There are examples of one or other of such human conduct in each of the essays. If you read the whole you come across not only the full range but diversity within that range. That is what makes it a book, not just a collection of individual reminiscences.

Thank you to each author for sharing your experiences with us. It is a delight to read. It should be read in full in order to get that complete sense from it. Obviously, the events that I have the greatest direct personal relationship with is the chapter by my brother, Mark.

There are people who feel there is nothing new to say about the Holocaust. However, this book has gone well beyond what a book like this will do in terms of educating those who are not familiar with the issues raised simply by what happened yesterday morning on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald.<sup>2</sup> I do not think there has been a Holocaust story on the front page of the Sydney Morning Herald for a very long time. It was personally extraordinary for myself and my family to wake up in the morning and see that. We knew that there would be an article, but we expected it somewhere in the back. That one story will unquestionably awaken a degree of interest from people who will never read this book.

The Holocaust is the kind of event that if you keep working at its significance, if you keep talking about it, there are ways of getting through the communication barrier. This fortuitously is one such occasion.

The journalist from the Sydney Morning Herald who wrote that piece was a young woman who was educated in Germany. She is not Jewish. She learned about the Holocaust in her high school education. That was why she was interested. It is the kind of interest that, of course, is wonderful to have for those of us who are more directly associated. It is the kind of interest that was always displayed by Caroline Jones, who is present today. She has, on previous occasions, interviewed my brother and she has written the introduction for this book. Everyone in the room thanks her for her continued interest and involvement in these high moral and spiritual issues.

For many years Holocaust survivors, whether adults or children, did not talk about their experience very much. In the public arena they did not attribute significance to their experience. It was in the 80s that this began to change and Holocaust survivor groups began to form, including this one. From that time there emerged testimony of a wide ranging character throughout the world. To that large body of memory and remembrance this is a worthy addition. It is of significance to almost everyone in this room in a personal way, but it is also a significant contribution from a broader perspective.

The basic theme of this book by members of the Child Holocaust Survivors Group is the importance of refusing to be victims. Being a victim is passive and a sign of weakness. Being a survivor is a mark of strength and of resilience. The message that comes through the book as a whole is one of strength and resilience by individuals.

There are certain things that emerge from all of the essays. The first is the sheer intelligence of the parents who enabled survival to occur, often by simply not believing what everyone else wanted to believe. The second, is the role of accident. Virtually every one of the essays attributes survival to some completely accidental event or luck. The more religious of you may be inclined to have a different explanation, but that's a bit difficult having regard to the entirety of the situation.

The third element is childhood memory. Childhood memory is something that comes back like flashbulb events or associations. Childhood memory is not a narrative or a chronology. Children do not remember in that sort of way. May I say I come across this all the time now in my current occupation, because of the number of child sexual assault cases that come before the Court. How children remember comes through in the book in a way that is of abiding interest to all of us.

It is important for all of us to get a sense of our personal narrative, of who we are, of what our family background was. That is very hard when you only have a flashbulb memory.

I was born after the war and the stories I was able to piece together from my parent's recollections and discussions were never complete, because it was difficult for them to talk about. The last member of my family of that generation is an aunt in New York. She emerged from Bergen-Belsen as a 16 year old girl suffering from typhoid. In terms of degrees of separation, Anne Frank died in the last week of the war from typhoid at Bergen-Belsen. There is a connection there that goes from Australia to Holland. My aunt will not talk about her experiences to this day. Others have been able to. My mother began to talk about it, because of the Holocaust survival group in Sydney when it emerged in the mid 80s.

The significance of my brother's contribution to this book for me and for my family cannot be understated. This is part of the personal identity of each of us. I did know most of these stories in one way or another, but not all them and not in the way he has recorded them. It is significant for me, and of course for my children, to read his recollections. I am sure that is true also of the families of other child survivors who contributed to this volume.

The memories of my own family was put in a dramatically different way by the publication, I am sure you are aware of *Maus*, the cartoon history of the Holocaust by my cousin, Art Spiegelman. In *Maus* my father is a character of significance, because he hid with Art's father just before the ghetto in Sosnowiec, the town where I was born, was liquidated.

Mark is depicted in *Maus* as a crying baby. He says in his memoirs that he was taught not to cry. Well Vladek, Art's father, had a different memory. At least on one occasion he did cry. He was probably two at that time. It is understandable that his memory, in the flash bulb type of manner, was not complete.

The stories from my childhood were put into a chronological sequence by Art's work. As you know he won the Pulitzer Prize for *MAUS*. No one could think of a category in which it could fit. The Pulitzer Prize is usually given in categories of drama, fiction, non-fiction etc. They just gave him a Pulitzer Prize without a category. He created a new art form, the graphic novel, which is now quite established. But he did it in a particular way that carries a message through to many others, including non-Jews, by a mode of communication that has power and simplicity and force. I know that his image of Jews as mice and of Germans as cats does not appeal to everyone because it represents what the Germans tried to do and how they treated Jews as vermin. But of course that is the point. That is why he did it, because that is how Jews were treated. It is a form of artistic expression.

I might say that before he got his Pulitzer Prize, Spielberg produced the movie *American Tale*, which had Jews as mice. Art was convinced that Spielberg pinched various things from his work, but he decided not to sue because Spielberg was a little more powerful and wealthier than he was.

When an exhibition of Art's original artworks toured Australia, I opened it at the Jewish Museum in Melbourne. My son, Daniel, who is here, wrote a very insightful personal memoir about the significance of *Maus* for him. It was published in the catalogue for that exhibition. His memoir shows the power of this special form of communication. He, as an eight year old, was able to absorb this story and realise that this was a part of his own personal history and background. Even as an eight year old, and thereafter, *Maus* became a constant reference point for him. As he said, it had an important influence on his own sense of identity as a child in Sydney and now as a young man.

The events which Mark has recollected in this chapter will also be of significance for my family and I hope for others. I am sure that the recollections of the 30 other contributors will also perform that function for their own families in the future. Records of this character are of great significance for the families of those individuals and also for the broader community.

In 2005, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, there was that extraordinary event at Auschwitz when Heads of State of some 30 different nations attended and, for the first time, accepted a wide ranging collective responsibility for what happened there. That was the culmination, at an international level, of the Holocaust remembrance movement, if I can call it that, that began in the 80s and of which this book is a manifestation. That anniversary was an important event internationally. It was not a final, but a

dramatic, act of remembrance on behalf of a large number of nations including by the then Chancellor of Germany.

Remembering the Holocaust has a special significance when anti-semitic acts are clearly on the rise throughout the world. There are parts of the world where the kind of irrational and completely inexplicable belief in the evils and propensities of Jewish people is gaining currency of a character that really we thought had ended in 1945. This is so particularly in the Muslim world, but not only in that part of the world.

I can give you one example from my personal experience. A few years ago I was in Malaysia and when I was leaving Kuala Lumpur I went to the airport bookshop to see what sort of different books might be available. In the current affairs section on the table in the middle of the bookshop were three books. One, which I knew existed was a virulently anti-semitic tract written by Henry Ford written in the early 20s. I have never seen it in print but I knew it existed. The second was a book I didn't know existed but, if anyone had asked me, I would say that someone had written a book like it. It was a book blaming Mossad for the assassination of John F Kennedy. After all everyone else has been blamed. The third book in the current affairs section, not the history section, on things you need to know now, was *Mein Kampf* in English.

That is a manifestation of the kinds of tensions that are present in the world today and anything that can be done to combat them, however small, is welcome. The book that is being launched today is of such character. The

Sydney Morning Herald piece yesterday is also of such a character. I congratulate all of those who are responsible for this project. Thank you for your contributions. I am happy to launch this wonderful book.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Words to Remember it: Memoirs of Child Holocaust Survivors* Scribe Publications, Melbourne 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Geesche Jacobsen “His brother is one of our most celebrated judges, but Mark Spigelman has an even more extraordinary tale. He survived the Nazis by dressing as a girl.” *Sydney Morning Herald* 23-24 May 2009.