

## **The Holocaust – Learning the lessons**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, 1945, one of the darkest chapters of contemporary history began to draw to a close when Russian allied troops liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most notorious of all the Nazi concentration camps of the Second World War. Auschwitz was the scene of some of the most horrifying moments of the holocaust, and its name and images have become synonymous with some of the most appalling violations of the rights of humanity ever committed. The Nazi's 'final solution' was a plan to exterminate not only the world's Jewish population, but also it's disabled, Romani, gay, politically left, Slavs and many other minorities not attuned to, and in agreement with, the ideals of Nazi Germany. Some 6 million Jews were murdered under the Nazi regime; conservatively this represents six times the population of Lincolnshire, murdered for nothing more than who they were! This week marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, and the repercussions of the holocaust are still very much felt to this day and the message is clear that it must never be forgotten.

The atrocities of the holocaust shocked the world, and out of the embers of WW2 human rights and the notion that everyone, simply by virtue of their status as a human being, is entitled to certain rights and protections, came to the forefront of international thinking and legal processes. In a desperate attempt to ensure a repeat of the holocaust never happens, governments committed themselves to forming the United Nations and soon after the main international human rights document, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), was drafted. The foundations of the European Union were born at the same time, and subsequently the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was drafted, this document is now ratified by all member states of the EU and Article 6(3) of the Treaty on European Union states that 'fundamental rights, as guaranteed by the convention....shall constitute general principles of the Unions law'. The protections of human rights and freedoms afforded by law have gone some way towards ensuring equality is more widespread and human rights are better observed, however societies are a long way from being able to say

they are free from discrimination and inequality. In Lincolnshire these are prominent issues stretching countywide; the ever expanding ethnicity and increasingly diverse cultural make up of the county's population is not viewed as a good thing in all corners. In a county witnessing an increasingly diverse population<sup>i</sup>, Lincolnshire must look to the past to ensure the same mistakes are not repeated, to ensure persecution and discrimination is not carried out and that people are treated fairly and equally, regardless of difference.

One of the most sobering and startling points to remember about the holocaust is that it happened less than a lifetime ago, many survivors of both the war and the concentration camps are still alive to tell their stories today. Yehuda Bacon is one such survivor and he recounted his story of surviving Auschwitz to the BBC<sup>ii</sup>. Yehuda was the only one of his family to survive the concentration camps, persecuted because of his heritage he himself was left for dead, but luckily he survived and has been able to tell his story and share his, at times horrific, experiences. In Lincolnshire we are party to an organic and ever changing society that is becoming increasingly diverse and multi-cultural. We must learn from the holocaust, and from survivors such as Yehuda, and look to it as a stark reminder that prejudice and victimisation based on arbitrary parameters such as ethnicity, religion and cultural values is destructive, cruel and detrimental to our society. Instead we must remain true to the values and ideals represented in the UDHR and other human rights instruments, we must advocate equality and ensure that people are not victimised and marginalised within our society and that we hold dearly values of acceptance, tolerance and equality.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.research-lincs.org.uk/UI/Documents/Population%20Trends%20-%20Lincolnshire%202010.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/witness/january/27/newsid\\_4184000/4184147.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/witness/january/27/newsid_4184000/4184147.stm)

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About the author:-

Before beginning my legal studies in Nottingham, I spent several years working with children and young people in Lincolnshire who displayed a range of learning, social, behavioural and physical difficulties. During my time doing this I worked predominantly as a residential care officer at St Lawrence School, in Horncastle, and as a member of the teaching and support team at The Chestnuts Education Centre, in Boston. Both of these roles had their own unique challenges and

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each one afforded me invaluable experience that stretches across the boundaries of education, social care, equality and diversity and psychology, amongst others.

I am excited to be working with JUST Lincolnshire, my future career ambitions lead into the fields of academic law and international and domestic human rights law and policy and I hope my work with JUST Lincolnshire can be beneficial and supportive to me as well as the organisation and, importantly, the people of Lincolnshire. I was born in Lincoln County Hospital and have lived almost all of my life in the county, as such I am determined to make a difference within my local community by advocating and assisting in the promotion of equality and human rights.

I am always keen to speak to anyone about any issues they may, questions they may wish ask or anything else, so please, feel free to contact me and I will endeavour to response as promptly as I can.

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