

ANZAC Day, 2019, Havelock North

Inge Woolf QSO (Founding Director, Holocaust Centre of New Zealand)

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa and Shalom.

Honoured guests, Ladies and gentlemen, children.

I am honoured to speak to you today as a Holocaust Survivor, a Refugee and a Child of War.

My earliest memories are as a three-year-old, seeing the Swastikas come out in Vienna where I was born, to welcome Hitler's Army. As a young Jewish child, I was afraid. Very afraid, so much so that even now, as I speak of it, and every time I speak of it, my stomach tightens up and my skin goes clammy.

I was lucky my father, Jene, and mother Grete understood what was happening and managed to bring us to England and safety from certain death. In England we were refugees and survived the bombing in London. My father joined the Czech Brigade of Montgomery's army and fought all through Europe until victory was declared in 1945. That brave, gentle man was never the same again and passed away a few years later. So, when I speak of the evils of War, it is informed by personal experience

I am grateful to my grandchildren who readily came here to stand by my side. Not one of them would even be alive if Hitler's antisemitic and white supremacist policies had led to my murder as it did to the murder of one and a half million other Jewish children who were systematically and cynically killed in the most industrialised state sponsored genocide the world has ever known

My grandchildren are here to remind us all of the young men and women who served their country and paid the price. As we look at them, we are reminded of how young they all were. Pretty much the same age as my grandchildren who range from 28 down, Nathan my eldest grandson lives overseas, otherwise I know he would be here too, but Jason, Sam, Noah and Lily Jane stand here before you at the brink of their lives,-- Study, careers, marriage and children all stretching out before them as it did for the young people we remember and honour today.

This is not the first such occasion they have attended with me. All through their lives they have accompanied me to lay wreaths at Anzac Day and take part in Holocaust Remembrance Ceremonies.

I am so proud of them. They and their parents are always there for me and support the work I do through the Holocaust Centre of New Zealand to remember and educate against the evils of war, racism, intolerance and now since 15th March, Terrorism.

They also came to remember those family members, Great grandparents, a Great Aunt and a Great Uncle who came before them and were cruelly taken by such an evil war, some from Europe and two of New Zealand origin.

First let me introduce Jason, a science graduate and a sports promoter, he serves in the Territorial Army.

He will say the names of his Viennese great grandparents, one, an upright and entrepreneurial citizen, brutally beaten up by the Nazis causing him to have a heart attack, from which he died, the

other, a good mother of five children, drowned in a rickety overcrowded boat trying to reach safety in her Promised Land, Israel.

Jason says "My Great Grandparents, David and Rosalie Stiassny"

Then there is Sam, in his last year studying law. He will say the names of his Slovakian great grandparents and great Aunt who were murdered in the death camp of Sobibor and the notorious concentration camp of Auschwitz.

Sam says "My great Grandparents and Great Aunt, Adolf Ponger, his wife Carlotta ...and their daughter Ruzenka"

Next comes Noah, waiting for a place in the Airforce where he hopes to train as a pilot.

He remembers his New Zealand Great Grandfather, who was conscripted into the New Zealand Army in April 1942, aged 28, leaving behind a young family, a son Noel who was two and a daughter Myra who was 6. He was trained as a mechanic but was transferred to the infantry to cover for losses in that area and served in Egypt and Italy. He was killed in action 2nd August 1944 aged 30. He is buried in a military cemetery outside of Florence. His son, Noel barely remembers him.

Noah says "My Great Grandfather, Alan Hall"

Lily Jane is a student, who loves to sing and act and who has yet to decide on her path in life and she remembers her Great Uncle who piloted Mosquitos. He had done his allotted number of runs over enemy territory but felt the need to do more. He was listed as "missing in action" in July 1944. His plane came down in the middle of France near a small village. He is buried there.

Lily –Jane says "My Great Uncle, Ron Beazer"

As you see my family has personal experience of war and the cruel and senseless loss of life of good people.

At the Holocaust Centre, we not only remember the six million Jews who were murdered although, of course that is an important part of our work, but we also teach the lessons of that terrible history,

We are often asked, "How, in a highly sophisticated, cultured and well-educated society, which was Germany at that time, did it happen that a monster like Hitler could get elected and change a democracy into a ruthless dictatorship and an extreme racist and expansionist regime? How did he get the people to follow him?". Well I guess there is no easy answer but historians like Timothy Snyder, in his book the "Black Earth, the Holocaust as History and Warning", point out that the world was in disarray after the end of the first World War. Germany was forced to pay out huge reparations which led to an economic crisis and on top of that it was not able to produce enough food to feed its people, so there was unhappiness and unrest and he promised to make Germany great again and restore its pride. 80% of Germans voted for him.

Alas, I am here to tell you that at the moment the world again is not in a good place. We are facing a huge threat to our very existence, the threat of Global warming, there are food shortages in places like Africa, South America and Asia. In Paris and London there are riots in the streets. All over Europe far right parties are on the rise and have even been elected into government, Britain is in turmoil over Brexit. Mr Trump has reversed his countries position as a haven for the displaced and poor, and

pulled the USA out of International agreements. Mr Putin seems to be also intent on starting a second cold war. In the Middle East, Africa and Asia there are violent tribal wars leading to massive refugee problems

Once again, we are facing an increase in extremism, mouthing the politics of separatism and hate. Leading to anti - Semitism, islamophobia and racism in general.

Every religion has recently been targeted by terrorist attacks, Jewish people praying in a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Muslims praying in their Mosques unbelievably here in Christchurch and within the last week Christians praying in their churches in Sri Lanka! Nowhere it seems is immune from Extremism.

At the Holocaust Centre we teach, young people especially, the lessons of the Holocaust, how hate speech leads to hate action and racism leads to the greater evils of Extremism, Terrorism, Genocide and War.

I am asking you all to be Upstanders and fight against intolerance wherever you find it, be it large or small, in the playground, on the sports field, in the political arena or in places of worship and especially on Social Media. Let us follow the example of our Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and call out for kindness and respect for the Human Rights of all in our small, proud country of New Zealand...

Finally let us again look at my grandchildren and this time think of those young people who at roughly the same age as they are, would be the ones we rely on, who would be called to fight another war and let us vow to do all in our power to prevent this happening again ever as we stand up and show leadership for a better world and an inclusive society.

Let us remember!



Inge Woolf QSO (Founding Director, HCNZ) and grandchildren, Jason, Sam, Noah & Lily-Jane.
(Credit Woolf Photography)