

A Mobile Museum of Tolerance – Just In Time

by Jacqueline Carroll

2020 was an unprecedented and eye-opening year for the world. Not only did the coronavirus pandemic shut down the way we eat, work, and move around in society, it instilled a deep fear of getting and spreading the disease and led to the deaths of over two million people worldwide. Whilst stuck in our homes, we saw the bubbling rise of hatred and venom for “the other” spew out in catastrophic ways. This included the horrifying day where our Capitol was besieged by insurrectionists, some carrying the Confederate flag and another wearing a “Camp Auschwitz” shirt. If ever there was a need to lower the flame, take a breath and learn about our similarities and experiences, it is now. Which is why the launch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Mobile Museum of Tolerance (“MMOT”) could not be more timely. I have had the great honor of being one of the first people to step foot in the MMOT. I believe it is an important vessel to teach people to recognize racism, anti-Semitism and hate, and to empower and inspire people to raise their voices against such hate to promote human dignity.

When visitors first arrive at the MMOT, they know they are in for something special by witnessing the images of human rights heroes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Anne Frank and Malala Yousafzai staring back at them. Walking inside the state-of-the-art, COVID-friendly bus, visitors are provided with masks and hand sanitizer as well as powerful scrolling quotes surrounding the theater-style seats. Once visitors are seated in moveable seats, a trained educator, like Elizabeth Blair, will engage in a brief discussion. One of four currently offered lessons (which will have been decided upon prior to the visit to the MMOT) will start by the educator playing a video produced by the Simon Wiesenthal Center’s Academy Award winning film division-Moriah films. Those lessons include:

- The Anne Frank Story: a striking and compelling film aimed for younger audiences to teach topics such as anti-Semitism, prejudice and stereotypes, and the power of the pen;
- Lessons and Legacy of the Holocaust and WWII: a film which demonstrates that the Holocaust is not just a Jewish story but a human story and provokes the viewer to recognize and speak out against hate and intolerance in their own communities;
- Dynamics and Discrimination: a powerful video which covers the American Civil Rights movement and shows viewers the historical inequalities which existed before and still persist to this day; and
- Ordinary People: a video which portrays the “bystander effect” and importance of speaking up and acting out against hate.

Personally, I found the video, “Ordinary People,” to be the most profound and impactful. Many of those who committed heinous acts of murder and violence against the Jewish people during the Holocaust were, in fact, so-called “ordinary people.” An example given is that 500 “ordinary people” were given the chance to shoot Jews (women and children included) and were told that if they did not want to participate in the killing, they would not be penalized. Only 100 walked away. This lesson teaches visitors to think about a hero’s characteristics, including integrity, courage, responsibility, and standing up for others. After one of the videos is presented, visitors will be led in a discussion tailored to that class on the perception of self, community, and the broader world. They will discuss the power of words and acts and then create a dialogue around critical issues such as racism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism.

The MMOT, which is the first of its kind in the United States, will be traveling across the State of Illinois to reach diverse groups of students, faith groups, law enforcement agencies, businesses, and community and government leaders. Lessons were developed through collaboration with the Illinois State Board of Education and comport with 105 ILCS 5/27-20.3 (“Holocaust and Genocide Study”). For more information or to book the MMOT, please visit mmot.com, email MMOT@wiesenthal.com, or call (312) 981-0105.

Jacqueline Carroll, Decalogue Board Member and co-chair of Decalogue’s Committee Against Anti-Semitism and Hate, was a Cook County Assistant State’s Attorney for over eleven years and is Founder of We Persist!, a legal consulting firm dedicated to the advocacy of human rights. Jacqueline works with the Simon Wiesenthal Center and Chairs the Simon Wiesenthal Center Midwest Region’s Community Engagement Committee.