

THE ASPER FOUNDATION

The Asper Foundation, Pillars of Yad Vashem, was founded in 1983 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, by the late Israel and Babs Asper and today is managed by their children Gail (President and Trustee), Leonard (Chair and Trustee) and David Asper (Trustee), as well as Richard Leipsic (Trustee). In addition to the Asper International Holocaust Studies Program at Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies, which was launched two decades ago, the Asper Foundation supports many Jewish and Israeli community projects.

In a special interview for *Yad Vashem Jerusalem Magazine*, Gail Asper, O.C., O.M., LL.D, looked back at her parents' dedication to Yad Vashem and Holocaust education, and reaffirmed her commitment to supporting the World Holocaust Remembrance Center for the sake of future generations.

What Yad Vashem project speaks to you the most?

For obvious reasons, the Asper International Holocaust Studies Program is something that is very close to our hearts.

The Program was conceived to educate the wider public about the events of the Holocaust through various multilevel educational initiatives. Developed in partnership with Yad Vashem's educational experts, it incorporates comprehensive

professional development programs, support for Yad Vashem's international educational conferences and expert international engagement, among other facets. Tens of thousands of beneficiaries from over 70 countries have been impacted since the program's inception. I know my parents deeply believed that Yad Vashem was the premier world institution serving as the memory repository for Holocaust victims and one of the key global educational

institutions attempting to inoculate people from racism and hatred. We've been very pleased with the progress of this program and the positive difference it is making.

In announcing the creation of this program in 2002, my father said: "The Asper Foundation is proud to play an integral role in supporting Yad Vashem, a world-renowned institution respected not only for commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, but imparting the lessons



of the Holocaust and educating people worldwide to help ensure that the rally cry 'Never Again' refers not only to Jews, but to all peoples." I believe this nicely sums up why we established this program and why the Foundation continues to support Yad Vashem.

What experience did you find particularly meaningful at Yad Vashem?

I will never forget my first visit to Yad Vashem in 1974, when I was fourteen. In one life-changing visit, I learned more about the Holocaust than with all my previous studies combined. The Children's Memorial in particular left an indelible mark, and its effect on me is as powerful today as it was 48 years ago.

Each time I visit Yad Vashem, I find the experience extremely moving and always learn something new. It's an institution filled with such depth and breadth. Knowing that

my commitment to Yad Vashem was established through my parents is what moves me and my family the most, and inspires us to continue our relationship and support.

Who from the Shoah has inspired you the most?

There are so many inspirational people connected with the Shoah. Two individuals stand out to me: Simon Wiesenthal, as he embraced the Jewish concept of justice as action; and Elie Wiesel, as he understood Judaism's belief that being witness to injustice obligates people to educate others. As well, I have always been moved by Anne Frank's experiences and her positive views about life and the importance of *Tikkun Olam* [repairing the world]. I am also stirred by stories of the Righteous Among the Nations such as Anne's rescuer Miep Gies, who risked

their own lives to save those of their Jewish friends and neighbors.

What do you think would surprise others to know about Yad Vashem?

I think that many people would be surprised by just how robust Yad Vashem's research is and the extent of its outreach to hundreds of millions of people around the world. It is not just a museum, but is also an effective and world-class education and research institution.

What do you think is a major challenge that faces Yad Vashem in the near future?

The major challenge facing Yad Vashem is the ability to continue effectively imparting its message to younger generations. Without a deep understanding of the Holocaust, and the long history of antisemitism and circumstances that allowed it to take place, it is hard to understand and react appropriately to human rights abuses that are taking place today.

This area of Holocaust education has always been relevant, but its significance in the last few years has become even more pronounced with the waning number of survivors, increasing Holocaust denial, revisionism and distortion, as well as growing antisemitism, including by some dressed in the cloak of criticism of Israel.

We are very confident, as always, that Yad Vashem is up to the task.