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Presents of the Past: The Future of the Millennial Generation

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Presents of the Past: The Future of the Millennial Generation

As time goes on, the children of our generation seem to fall increasingly behind. They are so wrapped up in their own cares and worries that they cannot spare a second to glance behind them once in a while, to worry about something other than the present. They are too caught up in the moment to worry about the future, too busy living each day without a care in the world to do just that:

To have a care of what will become of the world they live in.

The Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie, IL seeks to remedy that situation. Here, countless docents have devoted their lives to educating the young and restless, ready to answer a question when curiosity strikes. The museum's reputation is impressive, gathering visits from 10,000 people each year. Surprisingly enough though, the museum, which hosts amazing exhibits on a regular basis, prizes one thing above all others, and it isn't beneath a glass case.

When asked what the most precious treasure this museum possessed was, docent Barbara Jo Scott replied, "So many of the artifacts have a personal connection to our local survivors that it is impossible to pick just one. Cipora Katz's blanket and her story of survival, Fritzie Fritzshall telling her story of arriving in the camps and the murder of her mother, Aaron Elster hiding in the attic for two years all help to illustrate to our students how the Holocaust affected the lives of real life people. Our greatest "artifact" is our group of survivors and eye witnesses who speak to our student groups. No one can connect with the kids like they can."

She went on to describe that the museum's mission is to remember the past in order to better inform the future. But change for the young comes surprisingly slowly. The museum

encourages kids to start out by making little changes in their lives, perhaps including an outcast kid at their lunch table during the weekdays, or to just see a situation from another's point of view. "As a former teacher and an active docent, I am very happy when I hear the students taking with each other about including kids at the lunch table, starting conversations to get to know the new kid a little better...realizing that just because we disagree on something we do not have to be enemies. I specifically remember one student coming to the conclusion that... "I should try to see it from his point of view".

Yet to speak only about the past would be ignoring some of the key players in modern kids' lives. Where does technology fit in with these ideas of weaving together former lives and present futures? Kids these days spend a surprising amount of time on the internet, more so than their parents. Children nowadays are defined as being part of a new generation, one where kindergartners are given iPads instead of coloring mats at the local pizza parlor. Some might consider technology as the death of the "good old days."

But history, the genre that advocates technology the *least*, has a way to adapt the digital era with the paper one. "Teaching history is the same as always whether the information is written on papyrus, parchment, textbooks, or cyberspace. People need to have a sense of history, not to win Trivial Pursuit, but to make their world a little better space for us all to live in."

The final lesson Mrs. Scott imparted on me was one of the questions this tech-savvy generation never wishes to ask: What *work* do we have to do?

"The harsh reality is that our survivors and eyewitness will not be with us forever. This is where technology is a wonderful thing. By filming survivors as they tell their stories, the students down the road will be able to get to know them.... Their stories, together with the

stories of survivors of Rwanda, Serbia, Cambodia, North Korea, and other 20th century genocides, need to be told as long as genocide and conflict exist. To quote Fritzie, "We don't all have to look the same. We don't all have to speak the same. We are all human beings and we need to take care of our neighbors."

Mrs. Scott then went on to give an example of how she had utilized a video of Gerta Weissman Klein in a documentary of a survivors' remembrance to show children the firsthand accounts of certain holocaust survivors. She described her wonder at seeing the children's' faces change over the course of the video. Their eyes were glued to the pixelated screen as they watched, in rapture, every single word that Gerta said play out before their very eyes. Her story had to have been recorded not just for their sakes, but for the sake of making a difference. Mrs. Scott, a former teacher herself, hoped to instill within them a new sense of morality.

To put it one way, she hoped to make the past their future. She hoped to challenge their views of the world and generation that they lived in. She did all this so that the people of the past could continue to influence the children of tomorrow, even when all that was left was a story...

And she was going to be the first one to tell it.