

## **YOM HASHOAH 2019**

For the close to 100 people who showed up at last night's observance of Yom HaShoah sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Ulster County and hosted by Congregation Kol Hai of New Paltz, the evening was filled with haunting and painful memories that somehow seemed more poignant and immediate to this observer than in previous years.

Perhaps it was the place, Deyo Hall, in New Paltz's Historic Huguenot Street district. It should be noted that those first Protestant Calvinist, Huguenot settlers arrived on the banks of the Wallkill River fleeing religious persecution in their home country at the hands of their Catholic compatriots. Between 5,000 and 30,000 Huguenots lost their lives during what has become known as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, which began on the night of August 23, 1572 in Paris and raged for several weeks through the French countryside.

Perhaps it was New Paltz itself, where the school district has been rocked in recent months by several incidents of vandalism in the middle and high schools involving anti-Semitic graffiti scratched on desks and painted on bathroom walls, and is still grappling to find a way to respond.

Perhaps it was Charlotte Tusch's account—on this, her second occasion as the organizer of the event for the Jewish Federation, inheriting the responsibility from our beloved Bruria Falik—in which she described her own life's odyssey of running from her family's experience of the Holocaust in her youth in search of assimilation to embracing it fully as an adult, or Julia Indichova's haunting plea to her mother to save her brother, assuring her mother that she would still be born and know her for her true mother.

Perhaps it was Shir Yaakov's call to us to hold Yom HaShoah not as a memorial to 6 million lives lost, but to 6 million individual souls, each of which had a name, a family, a home to return to, an identity in the larger society, killed for no other reason than that they were Jewish.

Or, perhaps it was the underlying message of the sum total for me: that "never again" is not a guarantee. It is a responsibility for all of us to recreate and keep recreating with every breath we take.

Thank you to Kol Hai of New Paltz for hosting this year's truly memorable event, and to its spiritual leader, Shir Yaakov, for creating a deeply moving theme for the evening. Thank you to Charlotte Tusch whose organization of the event on behalf of the Federation intertwined so seamlessly with Kol Hai's. Thank you to Rabbis Jonathan Kligler and Bill Strongin for your participation; and to Pastor Tobias Anderson and Sufi Chaplain Laila Brady Walzer for yours. And, thank you to all of the survivors, second, third and fourth generation survivors, and other members of the community who turned out for this year's remarkable memorial service.

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