A survivor sees himself or herself as a messenger and guardian of secrets entrusted by the dead. A survivor fears he or she may be the last to remember, the last to warn, the last to tell the tale that cannot be told, the tale that must be told in its totality, before it is too late, before the last witness leaves the stage and takes his awesome testimony back to the dead.

In the hope that you will enable this testimony to be brought to the attention of the American people, and the world, I submit the attached report to you, Mr. President.

Respectfully yours, Elie Wiesel
Chairman, President's Commission on the Holocaust, 1979
He was acutely aware that the proposed museum in the capital of the free world needed to make Holocaust memory a transformative force for change. It was a bold proposal. Elie never hesitated to be bold and pushed all those involved in what he called “the most important project of my life” to be more than we thought we could be. Leading this historic campaign as honorary chairman was Elie’s final expression of that ethos. As stewards of this memory and with his guidance, we launched this campaign to help the Museum realize its enormous potential to address some of the most pressing issues of our times—ideological extremism, violent hate and antisemitism, and the persistent threats of genocide.

Elie is gone, but his vision and moral compass will always guide and challenge us.

Once when asked by his students what would happen when there were no survivors left to tell the story, Elie replied, “Just think, perhaps you are the only hope I have. Fulfill it.” This is precisely the role of the Museum.

Elie never gave up hope that if empowered with the truth of the Holocaust, the good in people would ultimately prevail over indifference—the great enabler of evil.

With this campaign, we’re making an investment in humanity because we believe it too.

Tom A. Bernstein                  Allan M. Holt   Sara J. Bloomfield
Chairman                   Vice Chairman   Director

Elie described the “awesome and forbidding” work of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust as “a task which required reaching far back into the past as well as taking a hard look into the future.”

Elie is remembered for his steadfast dedication to his commitment to the past, present and future. He was acutely aware that the proposed museum in the capital of the free world needed to make Holocaust memory a transformative force for change. It was a bold proposal. Elie never hesitated to be bold and pushed all those involved in what he called “the most important project of my life” to be more than we thought we could be. Leading this historic campaign as honorary chairman was Elie’s final expression of that ethos. As stewards of this memory and with his guidance, we launched this campaign to help the Museum realize its enormous potential to address some of the most pressing issues of our times—ideological extremism, violent hate and antisemitism, and the persistent threats of genocide.

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Preparing The Collection of Record to Move to Its Permanent New Home

Preparing the Collection of Record to Move to Its Permanent New Home

The artifact’s degradation and minimizes direct handling. Customized housing creates a neutral micro-environment that doesn’t contribute to housing and handling. Whether for documents, photographs, or objects, humidity, and light exposure, preventive conservation focuses on potential hazards and inherent weaknesses and to develop methods to mitigate risk during the move—

Artifact in the collection is being individually assessed to identify its vulnerabilities prepared for the move falls under the rubric of “preventive conservation.” Each The precision with which America’s collection of Holocaust documentation is being preparing it for the historic move this spring to the new Collections, Conservation and Research Center

There are 19,000 artifacts in the Museum collection—“object witnesses” that each tell a unique story. One is this scale model of a men’s barracks at Theresienstadt. For conservators, the question is how to house each artifact in a way that it can be safely moved and its preservation enhanced for the long term.

Jiri Lauscher was deported to Theresienstadt from Prague in December 1942. His woodworking skills got him assigned to the camp technical department—a shift that ultimately saved his life. Immediately after the war, Jiri built a scale model of his experiences. Like a macabre dollhouse, the intricate details include clothing and accessories with names of victims. Today, a team of trained Museum specialists are preparing for the move falls under the rubric of “preventive conservation.” Each artifact in the collection is being individually assessed to identify its vulnerabilities and inherent weaknesses and to develop methods to mitigate risk during the move—

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What are the challenges of conserving the Museum’s collection?

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Why is it important for the Museum to train new conservators?

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It is a simple motto that has defined a life’s passion: Law, not war. A belief staunchly held when Benjamin Ferencz, as he said, “poured into hell.” Following law school in 1943, Ferencz, who had emigrated as an infant with his family from Transylvania to America in 1920, served in an artillery battalion preparing for the invasions of France. Toward the end of the war, because of his legal training, he was assigned to a team tasked with collecting evidence for a new war crimes branch.

He was sent into the camps as American soldiers liberated them, so he was among the few witnesses. “Even today, when I close my eyes, I witness a deadly vision I can never forget.” Shortly after being honorably discharged from the US Army in 1945, he was called back to serve in the prosecution of Nazi perpetrators at the Nuremberg war crimes trials. He was only 27 years old when he was assigned to a team tasked with collecting evidence for a new war crimes branch.

Ferencz was his first case. “I didn’t ask for the death penalty, I simply asked for a new rule of law that would protect humankind against the type of criminal abuse,” explained Ferencz. “We hoped that we would lay a foundation stone saying that genocide was a crime, crimes against humanity are punishable. Nobody is immune.”

Still going strong at 96, the last living Nuremberg prosecutor has relentlessly pursued his vision of a world of law over war for seven decades. A generous $1 million gift from the Planethood Foundation to the Museum’s Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide to establish the SIMON-SKJODT CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE Initiative—a gift renewable annually for up to $10 million—is the latest in a host of gifts.

“My hope is that people will not be content to look at the past and say ‘never again’ and then do nothing. So I am taking the measures for preventing it from ever happening again.”

—Benjamin Ferencz

RIGHT: A photograph of Benjamin Ferencz. “I came into the world a poor boy. I want to go out of this world a poor boy,” he says. “My resolve is to give it all back in gratitude for the opportunity I’ve had in the United States. I have been trying with my life, ever since I can remember, to try and create a more peaceful and humane world. I realize it will not happen in my lifetime, because I’m trying to reverse thousands of years of tradition and glorification of war.”

The new initiative will aim to strengthen the legal architecture for atrocity prevention and response, promote justice and accountability for atrocities committed in countries of concern, and establish a significant new locus for policy and research.

“We’re planning to make sure the fight he has waged through his life, continues after he is gone,” says Cameron Hudson, director of the Simon-Skjodt Center. “Ben’s vision I can remember, to try and create a more peaceful and humane world. I realize it will not happen in my lifetime, because I’m trying to reverse thousands of years of tradition and glorification of war.”

The Museum is grateful to our supporters who have made gifts in memory of the $250,000 annual contribution between May 29, 2014, and September 30, 2015.

Gifts of $500,000 and Above

Peter and Adrienne Feuer $1,000,000 gift to the Museum's Endowment

Michel F. Adler $316,800 grant to the Cataloging, Description and Digitization Project; $173,700 to the Collections, Conservation and Research Center

Anne L. and Stanley S. Minkoff $420,000 grant to the Initiative for the Study of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

Abbott and Adrienne Weitzen $900,000 gift to the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide

University of Virginia $36,600 grant to the Cataloging, Description and Digitization Project; $73,700 to the Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945; $1,100 to the American and the Holocaust Initiative; $20,000 gift to the Endowment

Jenn Dey Foundation Atlanta, GA $420,000 grant to the Initiative for the Study of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union

The Harris Family Foundation Chicago, IL $1,000,000 gift to the Survivor Affairs Program

Gifts of $250,000 and Above

Amerines $99,000 gift to the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany New York, NY

$99,000 to the Scholars Initiative

Clayton Foundation Atlanta, GA $16,500 grant to the Cataloging, Description and Digitization Project

Amerines $112,500 to Regional Education Summits

Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945; $920,000 gift to the Americans and Fela Shapell Family Institute for Holocaust Education

Amos E. and Esther N. Bazzanella $1,028,123 gift to the William Levine Conservation and Research Center

Trafalgar Partners $1,000,000 gift to the Collections, Conservation and Research Center

Livingston, NJ

Donors of the Katz Ehrenthal Special Collection $20,000 to the Scholarly Initiative, Online Tracing Service Archives

Bildners—Joan & Allen—Elisa Spungen & Rob, Nancy & Jim $112,500 gift to the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide

Spungen & Rob, Nancy & Jim $250,000 gift to the Collections, Conservation and Research Center

Katz Family New York $112,500 gift to the Planethood Foundation

Allen and Shelley Holt, through The Hillside Foundation $12,000,000 gift to the Reconstruction of the Permanent Exhibition

Gifts of $5,000,000 and Above

Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide $1,000,000 gift to the Planethood Foundation

Planethood Foundation Delray Beach, FL $1,000,000 gift to the Ben Ferencz International Justice Initiative

Michel F. Adler $12,000,000 gift to the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide

LEFT: In 2016, Ferencz was awarded the Museum’s highest honor, the Elie Wiesel Award, in recognition of his relentless efforts to search for approaches to generate prevention by creating greater accountability for crimes against humanity.
Museum Receives $20 Million Gift for the Revitalization of the Permanent Exhibition

Washingtonians Allan and Shelley Holt have made one of the largest gifts the institution has ever received to sponsor a 21st century, comprehensive revitalization of its acclaimed Permanent Exhibition. The gift will ensure that the centerpiece of the Museum, which attracts 1.6 million visitors a year as well as many heads of state, will remain a state-of-the-art educational experience for people from all parts of the world and all walks of life.

With the Museum’s 25th anniversary in less than two years, the exhibition project will be central to the institution’s strategic vision for its next 25 years. This will be a pivotal period for the Museum as it continues to work with Holocaust survivors and other eyewitnesses to build its collection and ensure their history is transmitted to future generations with authenticity and sensitivity through an updated exhibition. “The power of the Permanent Exhibition is at the heart of the Museum’s ability to impact new generations,” said Museum Chairman Tom Bernstein. “The Holts’ transformative gift will enable the institution to move into the future with the bold vision that our challenging times demand of us.”

See the feature article on the impact of the Holts’ transformative gift and the revitalization of the Permanent Exhibition in the fall issue of MEMORY&ACTION.