

Remembrance

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Yesterday I was one of several speakers at Boston's annual Yom HaShoah Holocaust Remembrance ceremony at Faneuil Hall. The neo-Nazi protesters who had planned to be there - and because of whom the hall was ringed with police - did not show up, and one wonders if their shaved heads are uncomfortable in drenching rain.

It was a hideous day, a downpour, and I confess to jealousy of the mayor, whose car collected him afterward from the front door --- having driven right up over the cobblestones -- while I (and everyone else) had to make our normal-person way, dripping, to our own vehicles.

It felt as if the world wept. And inside, in the company of Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren, it seemed appropriate as we all mourned the unconscionable loss of so many victims.

The speaker whom I found most moving was Dr. Wolfgang Vorwerk, the Consul-General of Germany, who talked of his country's determination to teach their children about the past and its horrors. Perhaps that was especially meaningful to me because my 12-year-old dual-citizen granddaughter is growing up in Germany and I have watched her own mother's commitment to telling her the truth about that time.

But there is so much hatred, still. I tried, in my own brief talk, to tell of my feeling that the time is past for hatred, that the world is small, now, and people interconnected and that though we must mourn what we've lost - and tell each other and our children - our stories, we must also move ahead and beyond. I described my son's wedding in Germany and how I had looked around, as a soprano sang: "Where you go, I will go. Your people will be my people" ... and I realized that in the same month, back in 1945, my son's Jewish stepfather, 18 years old, had been in uniform and with weapons, on the island of Okinawa; and his new mother-in-law, nine years old at the time, had been hiding and sobbing, with other children, in a basement in a German village, because the American troops were entering and they feared for her lives.

"The door opened," she had described to me, "and the light came in. I looked, crying, and saw the first black man I had ever seen. He was wearing an American uniform. He turned to the ones behind him and said 'Alle sint kinder.' They are all children. Then he reached into his pocket and gave us candy."

How small the world has become. Surely we are all each other's people now. And how important it is to let go of hatred.

I told the audience one version of a frequently-told and apocryphal story:

An old Cherokee told his grandson about a battle that goes on inside every human.

He said, "There are two wolves battling each other inside us all.

One wolf is Evil. It is anger, envy, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, lies, superiority, and ego.

The other wolf is Good. It is joy, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which wolf wins?"

The old Cherokee replied, "The one you feed."

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