



NEW JERSEY

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**QuickTakes!**

## 'Hidden Child' of the Holocaust Speaks at Kean University Kristallnacht Commemoration

November 7, 2018



The lifelong psychological toll of the Holocaust on children who lived in hiding to avoid capture by the Nazis was recounted in emotional detail on November 5, 2018 at Kean University by Albert Hepner, one of those “hidden children.”

Professor Hepner, the author of *Avrumele: Recollections of a Hidden Child*, and a Kean adjunct ESL professor, was the featured speaker at the Holocaust Resource Center’s

commemoration of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht, the “Night of Broken Glass.” That name reflects the night when Nazi anti-Semitic policies triggered violence in 1938 and nearly 100 German Jews were killed. Mr. Hepner lived in hiding in Brussels, separated from his family, from the ages of five to 10.

“In many ways, I remain a hidden person,” he said, recalling that the experience forced him to deny who he was. “I was scared the entire time. Everybody was a stranger, and there was no hope ahead.”

Mr. Hepner described a fractured relationship with his mother, whom he didn’t see at all for two of his years in hiding, and who waved him away from her window once, when he ran to her scared in the middle of the night. Meeting with other hidden children in 1991 helped heal many of his emotional scars, he said.

The Kean commemoration came about a week after the Tree of Life massacre in Pittsburgh, in which 11 Jews were murdered as they worshipped at their synagogue.

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“It feels exasperating to me when you hear what is going on now,” Mr. Hepner said. “I am very, very angry that it hasn’t changed, and I don’t know what will change it.”

The mission of the Holocaust Resource Center at Kean University is to foster awareness of the Holocaust among students, teachers and community members.

“Albert Hepner’s moving eyewitness testimony about a childhood destroyed by Nazism, delivered with courage and conviction, is the most powerful tool for helping students think about the Holocaust on an individual level,” said Adara Goldberg, PhD, director of the Center. “Eighty years after Kristallnacht, as we are witnessing a resurgence in racism-fueled hate crimes in America and abroad, his story is more important than ever.”

The audience of Kean community members, including students like Patrick Smith, a freshman political science major from Sayreville, was moved by Professor Hepner’s story.

“The image in my head of my mother waving me away and telling me not to come back brings a tear to my eye,” Mr. Smith said. “I am very thankful that he could tell his story, but I am sad that he had the experiences in the first place.”

A second Kristallnacht commemoration was held at the Kean Ocean campus in Toms River, with Fred Heyman, a Holocaust survivor and the subject of the documentary *Be An Upstander: The Fred Heyman Story*, as the featured speaker.

## **ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST RESOURCE CENTER AT KEAN UNIVERSITY**

The Holocaust Resource Center (HRC) is a joint initiative between Kean University and the Holocaust Resource Foundation, a private philanthropic organization founded by Holocaust survivors who rebuilt their lives in New Jersey. The HRC was established in 1982 to foster and reinforce ongoing awareness of the Holocaust among students, teachers and community members. From its inception, the Foundation’s founders recognized education as the integral driving force behind the organization. Today, the Center continues to honor its founders by promoting messages of respect, understanding and empowerment. We fulfill our educational mandate in three ways: collections, commemorative events and teacher training.