

Graduate Spotlight

Every year, the International School for Holocaust Studies holds hundreds of seminars and conferences, in dozens of languages, for over 300,000 educators and students in Israel and around the world. Featured here is the story of what one of the School's graduates has achieved since:

Lani Berman

■ In March 2011, Lilia Skok, a high school history teacher and adviser at the History Teachers Association in Surazh, Russia, attended a seminar at the International School for Holocaust Studies, coordinated in conjunction with the Russian Research and Educational Holocaust Center in Moscow. In Russia, Skok had been thinking about how she could educate her students about Jewish life in Surazh before WWII, and raise awareness about what had happened to Russian Jewry during the Holocaust. Walking around the school building, she noticed a sign on one of the walls that read, "From 1941-1943, in this building and in this area, the fascists tortured and murdered 900 Soviet citizens." Skok decided to ask her students to research the origins of the sign, as well as the monument that stands next to it commemorating the victims.

Skok's students went out to interview residents who had witnessed the events of that time. They also visited the local archives, where they discovered a piece of information that very few local citizens had known or spoken about for over seven decades: the area in which their school now stands had been a ghetto in which 2,000 Jews from Surazh had been cruelly incarcerated during the Holocaust. Furthermore,



■ Lilia Skok (center) and her students visit WWII veteran Leonid Rogovoy to find out more about the Jewish community in Surazh

all of the 900 "Soviet citizens" commemorated on the plaque had been Jewish.

"We uncovered more and more details about what had actually happened to the Jewish community in Surazh," explains Skok. "My students were shocked, but I was able to turn their outrage into positive action: we set about organizing the school's International Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony on 27 January. The children used the personal stories of witnesses and Holocaust survivors to create an exhibition that told the heart-wrenching story of the ghetto, and the horrifying mass murder that had occurred in the vicinity."



Lilia Skok Russian Federation

Looking for further ways to connect her students to their past, Skok arranged for them to meet Leonid Rogovoy, a WWII veteran and former teacher at their school. Rogovoy directed the students to Sergei Panus, who lived in Surazh during the Nazi occupation. In turn, Panus told them the story of Israel Raynin, a young man who had managed to hide in one of the pits filled with the bodies of his fellow Jews after the Germans and their local collaborators had shot them dead. Raynin escaped and joined the partisans in the forest, but was killed shortly after. He was posthumously awarded the Order of the Patriotic War.

"Lilia's project with her students was clearly gratifying to her on a professional level, but it also touched her personally," remarked Dr. Irit Abramski, Head of the Russian Desk at the International School's European Department. "We hope she will continue to inspire other teachers in her region to conduct local history projects with their students, thereby keeping the memory of the Holocaust – and its individual victims – in the hearts and minds of communities across the country."

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