

**Monday, March 22, 2010**

<b>Monday, March 22nd</b>	<b>Melissa Weyek sent copy of book 2/20/10</b>	<b>Mother of Sorrows School 100 W. 87 Pl Los Angeles, CA 90003 (323) 758-6204</b>	<b>Arrive 9:45 Start 10:15 (<i>Number the Stars, Milkweed</i>)</b>	<b>1 90 students Grades 6-8</b>
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Sunny LA weather once again, 70 degrees, no humidity, light breeze.

Due to the efforts of the Sherry Bard and the USC Shoah Foundation, I had presentations scheduled in three different schools in the LA area.

I left the Beverly Hills Marriott Residence Inn at 8:45 AM and followed the GPS religiously to South Central LA.

This neighborhood is known to be home to a Hispanic and African-American population, with poverty and violence a daily part of their lives.

I pulled into the Mother of Sorrows School at 9:35 AM and parked in the church parking lot. The church itself is an adobe structure, well tended, about 50 years old – old by California standards. Melissa Weyek, the teacher with whom I had been in contact, was there to greet me.

She welcomed me warmly. After weeks of e-mail correspondence, it was lovely to actually meet Melissa in person. She was excited that I was there to speak to the children, and eagerly began sharing information about the school's history and background as well as all the children have been learning regarding the Holocaust.

The school is funded by Notre Dame and in the past few years has been renovated. The students wear uniforms. As I approached the school, seventh graders were outside for their recess. Their space was large and open. Some were playing with a Frisbee until it soared onto the roof and got stuck there! Others were gathered in groups talking or playing tag. The children were mostly Hispanic and African-American, as I expected.

I spoke to some of the girls; their warm smiles were shy and sweet.

I met with the tech person who led me back to the church where the projector and screen were set up in a large multi-purpose room. We connected my laptop and were ready to go.

The entire Middle School, grades 6, 7, and 8 quietly entered. The children were lined up and were led to spots on the floor. They were well behaved and excited about the presentation. I wondered how many guest speakers they actually have had.

Melissa introduced me and I began my program. Once again, the children were rapt listeners. I could see in their eyes that they were riveted to my father's story. They had recently read Milkweed by Jerry Spinelli and Number the Stars by Lois Lowry, so they had some background knowledge about the Holocaust: conditions in the ghetto, the role of righteous gentiles.

After I finished, there were many questions. *Why didn't your father escape to Sweden? What happened to your mother?*

I also told the kids other stories about what it was like growing up as a first generation American, and these kids could certainly relate to that. Many of their parents are foreign born and speak with an accent. The fact that they have the opportunity to attend a private Catholic school indicates their families' commitment to education and to the future of their children.

I found that the sixth graders were the most open. Many of them grouped around me, continuing to ask questions. They were endearingly curious.

My main goal is to explain to them, through my father's personal story, how horrible prejudice and bigotry can be, and to know that each of them has a voice and a choice every day in their own lives to make the right decision. Can this world become a better place if these kids grow up and become giving citizens? Can we continue to combat hatred?