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A SPECIAL YOM HASHOAH

Holocaust Survivor, Philanthropist
Michael Edelstein Honored

Ninety-three-year-old survivor Michael Edelstein, joined by his son, Ronald, and daughter, Susan, lit the sixth and final memorial candle at the program held at the NY State Supreme Court Building on April 24.

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Marking the Shoah At Court

Survivor and philanthropist Michael Edelstein honored

By FERN SIDMAN

In an extraordinary display of remembrance and solemn reflection, the Manhattan Supreme Court building—one of New York City’s

COVER STORY

most iconic judicial landmarks—became a sacred gathering place on April 24 as over 200 people assembled under its historic rotunda for a special Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom HaShoah) commemoration. The event was sponsored by the members of The Jewish

Lawyers Guild and the Gender Fairness Committee of the Supreme Court, Civil Branch.

The air beneath the building’s grand dome was filled with the weight of memory

keted the gathering was tangible, broken only by the quiet sounds of reflection and grief that echoed softly through the grand marble corridors.

The Honorable Martin Shulman, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First De-

partment, presided over the ceremony, delivered poignant welcoming remarks, and served as the master of ceremonies for the afternoon. Justice Shulman’s deep commitment to the

legal profession and Jewish communal life made him a fitting figure to lead such a significant event.

Mr. Edelstein brought a living connection to a world rapidly slipping beyond the reach of human memory.

and mourning, as participants paid tribute to the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, as well as the countless other victims of Nazi barbarism. The solemnity that blan-

keted the gathering was tangible, broken only by the quiet sounds of reflection and grief that echoed softly through the grand marble corridors.



Holocaust survivor Michael Edelstein, accompanied by his son Ronald and daughter Susan, was invited to light one of the six memorial candles.

Mr. Edelstein’s presence brought a living connection to a world rapidly slipping beyond the reach of direct human memory. His story, both harrowing and inspiring, is recounted in his memoir, *Live Another Day: How I Survived the Holocaust and Realized the American Dream*.

In an interview, Judge Shulman said, “My remarks essentially paraphrased those made by Israeli President Isaac Herzog in Poland. The president said, “With a broken heart, I remind us all that although after the Holocaust we vowed, ‘Never again,’ today, even as we stand here, the souls of dozens of Jews again ‘yearn within a cage,’ ‘thirsting for water and freedom’; as 59 of our brothers are held by terrorist murderers in Gaza, in a horrific crime against humanity. The return of the hostages is a universal human impera-

crime.” Judge Shulman added that commemorating the Holocaust and the evil that spawned it is the most effective way of challenging the rapidly escalating antisemitism that has taken hold of American college campuses.

As reported, Justice Shulman is a longstanding and active member of the Jewish Lawyers Guild, currently serving on its Board of Directors. His professional affiliations extend widely, including membership in the New York County Lawyers’ Association, the New York Women’s Bar Association, and the New York State Bar Association. His dedication to the judiciary and the community has been recognized through numerous honors, such as the Melvin C. Levine Award, the Benjamin N. Cardozo Award, and the Benjamin N. Cardozo

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School of Law Alumnus of the Year Award.

A seasoned lecturer and educator, Justice Shulman has long been a respected presence at legal conferences, bar associations, and the Intensive Trial Advocacy Program at Benjamin N. Cardozo Law School, where he serves as a faculty member.

Joining Justice Shulman in delivering readings and reflections were several distinguished members of New

York's judiciary: Judge Martin Shulman, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, delivered welcoming remarks to attendees at the Holocaust Remembrance Program. (Seated, L-R) Judge Suzanne J. Adams, Administrative Judge of the Supreme Court, New York County, Civil Branch; Judge Adam Silvera, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts; and Judge Deborah Kaplan, Justice Citywide Alternative Dispute Resolution Initiative.

York's judiciary: The Honorable Adam Silvera, recently appointed Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts in September 2024, also offered eloquent remarks. Justice Silvera now oversees the administration and operations of New York City's vast and bustling trial courts, succeeding Justice Kaplan in that critical role. His leadership is instrumental in guiding some of the largest and busiest courts in the nation.

The Honorable Suzanne J. Adams, appointed Adminis-

ters brought their unique voice and perspective to the remembrance, highlighting the

Six individuals were called upon to light six candles in memory of the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust.

shared responsibility of legal institutions in ensuring that the horrors of the Holocaust are never forgotten and that the values of justice, humanity, and dignity endure.

event's program, they included Judy White, Esq., Honorable Karla Moskowitz (Ret.), Es-

of history.

Their reverent lighting of the memorial candles infused the rotunda with profound symbolism—each flame flickering against the marble walls represented a defiant declaration that even in the aftermath of unspeakable loss, life and memory endure.

The sixth candle was lit by the only Holocaust survivor who participated in the ceremony, Mr. Michael Edelstein, a Manhattan resident in his 90s. As he approached the candle stand, accompanied by his children, Ronald and Sum-

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Judge Martin Shulman, Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, delivered welcoming remarks to attendees at the Holocaust Remembrance Program. (Seated, L-R) Judge Suzanne J. Adams, Administrative Judge of the Supreme Court, New York County, Civil Branch; Judge Adam Silvera, Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts; and Judge Deborah Kaplan, Justice Citywide Alternative Dispute Resolution Initiative.

York's judiciary:

The Honorable Deborah A. Kaplan now leads the Citywide Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Initiative after an illustrious tenure overseeing major civil litigation as Deputy Chief Administrative Judge. Justice Kaplan has become a transformative figure in promoting alternative paths to conflict resolution in New York's complex civil legal landscape.

The Honorable Adam Sil-

veria, recently appointed Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for the Manhattan Civil Supreme Court in October 2024, also participated in the commemoration. Justice Adams leads the day-to-day operations of one of New York State's most active civil jurisdictions, supervising an enormous judicial workforce that includes 60 Supreme Court Justices, 285 non-uniformed court staff, 104 uniformed officers, and 121 chambers personnel.

Each of these judicial lead-

ers brought their unique voice and perspective to the remembrance, highlighting the shared responsibility of legal institutions in ensuring that the horrors of the Holocaust are never forgotten and that the values of justice, humanity, and dignity endure.

In a powerful act of tribute, six individuals were called upon to light six candles in memory of the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, along with countless others who perished at the hands of the Nazi regime. Five of the six honored participants were relatives and descendants of Holocaust victims, each carrying with them the weight of family histories shattered by the horrors of genocide. According to the

ther Blatt, Ariella Zweben, Esq., and Barbara Lissner Urbach, Esq.

Each of these individuals stood not only as representatives of their families' legacies but also as living testaments to the resilience of a people who refused to let their loved ones' memories vanish into the void

Saluting Israel on her 77th Anniversary



THOMAS P. DINAPOLI
NEW YORK STATE
COMPTROLLER

Edelstein

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san, the audience erupted into thunderous, heartfelt applause. Yael Ariella Edelstein, Michael's granddaughter, also attended the Yom HaShoah commemoration at the Manhattan Supreme Court.

As The Manhattan Supreme Court commemoration program highlighted, Mr. Edelstein's journey began in Skala-Podolsk, in western Ukraine, where at the age of he escaped a Nazi roundup by rolling under barbed wire during Sukkot of 1942. This daring act was only the beginning of his odyssey for survival.

Six months later, he again narrowly evaded death by escaping the liquidation of the Borshchov ghetto. For more than a year, young Michael survived by hiding in forest bunkers and the ruins of buildings, until Nazi forces were finally expelled from the region in 1944.

Following liberation, Mr. Edelstein spent his adolescent years in displaced persons camps in postwar Germany, before arriving penniless in New York in 1951. Embodying the American Dream he so cherishes, he built a life from nothing—serving in the U.S. Army, becoming a successful roofing contractor, and raising a family in Brooklyn. His memoir weaves richly textured memories, often punctuated by a distinctly Yiddish humor that captures the indomitable spirit of survival and hope.

Among the many moving moments were the reflections of Ronald Edelstein, son of Michael Edelstein, who offered a deeply personal insight into the enduring significance of remembrance and the urgent challenges facing the Jewish community today.

At the conclusion of the cer-

emony, Ronald expressed heartfelt gratitude and admiration to the event's organizers, who honored his father's extraordinary life journey from survival of the Holocaust

finied to the pages of history, is again on the rise worldwide.

"The fact is, we are living in perilous times, and anti-Semitism is off the rails," he said bluntly. "We must be con-

The Jewish Lawyers Guild and the Gender Fairness Committee of the Supreme Court, Civil Branch sponsored the event.

stantly vigilant and dedicate ourselves to fighting this perennial hatred."

He added that, "the memory of the six million must not only be honored; it must serve as a shield and a rallying cry against the forces of bigotry that still threaten Jewish com-

For Ronald and his family, seeing Mr. Edelstein recognized not merely as a survivor but as a symbol of resilience, dignity, and triumph over hatred, was an affirmation of the countless sacrifices and struggles that Holocaust survivors endured to rebuild their lives.

Beyond the deeply personal honor of the day, Ronald emphasized the broader purpose of his father's testimony and the importance of events like the Yom HaShoah commemoration.

"It is my hope that my father's experiences during the Holocaust will help to inspire a new generation of Jews to ensure that such evil never rears its ugly head again," Ronald said.

His words reflected a crucial message permeating the event: Remembrance must not be passive. It must translate into action, education, vigilance, and resilience in the face of rising hatred.

Ronald's reflections also carried a sobering warning about the current climate of growing antisemitism. He did not shy away from confronting the uncomfortable reality that hatred against Jews, thought by some to be con-

stantly vigilant and dedicate ourselves to fighting this perennial hatred."

He added that, "the memory of the six million must not only be honored; it must serve as a shield and a rallying cry against the forces of bigotry that still threaten Jewish com-



Michael Edelstein and one of his granddaughters, Joelle Ariella Edelstein.

munities today."

After the final candle was lit, the assemblage participated in the collective chanting of El Maleh Rachamim—the Jewish prayer for the souls of the departed. Reverberating through the solemn rotunda, the prayer's ancient words called upon God's infinite mercy to grant rest and peace to the victims of the Holocaust.

"God full of Mercy," the prayer implores, "grant perfect rest under the wings of Your Divine Presence to the souls of all the holy and pure who were slaughtered." Recited traditionally at funerals, graveside visits, and memorial services such as Yizkor, the El Maleh Rachamim binds generations of Jewish mourners across centuries and continents in a single voice of yearning, memory, and love.

A highlight of the commemoration was a profoundly moving appearance by Rebbetzin Chaya Leah Walkin-Small, a Holocaust survivor whose extraordinary life journey stands as a testa-

ment to the resilience of the human spirit.

from Poland to Vilna, then onward to Kobe, Japan, and finally to Shanghai, China. Each step of their journey, she explained, reflected the desperate plight of thousands of Jewish families, cast adrift by genocide and facing overwhelming obstacles at every turn.

In her soft-yet-firm voice, Rebbetzin Walkin-Small described her early days in Kobe, where, for a brief time, she experienced what she called a "relative safety." Kobe offered a temporary haven, a place where Jewish refugees could regroup, find housing, and rebuild a semblance of everyday life after the trauma of escape. Religious life was revived, children continued their studies, and a battered but determined community formed again.

Yet even that safety proved fleeting. As the war widened and Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany deepened, Jewish refugees in Kobe found themselves under growing suspicion and pressure. Authorities demanded that the refugees leave, and they were soon forced to seek shelter elsewhere.

Rebbetzin Walkin-Small vividly recounted the dangers of the next chapter in her young life: the desperate exodus from Japan to Shanghai. "It was a journey filled with terror," she said, remembering how boats carrying Jewish refugees were frequently targeted and destroyed, their desperate passengers perishing at sea. The refugee ships were exposed, vulnerable to both natural dangers and the malice of war.

She spoke with emotion about the miraculous fortune that allowed her and her family to survive the treacherous voyage. Against seemingly impossible odds, their vessel safely reached the shores of Shanghai, one of the few remaining cities in the world at that time willing to accept Jewish refugees without visas or papers.

In a performance that com-

bined youthful energy with profound reverence, the young singers of the SAR High School Choir offered a moving musical tribute that resonated deeply with the assemblage.

Led by Rabbi Kenneth Birnbaum, a renowned choir master celebrated for his dedication to nurturing musical excellence in Jewish education, the SAR students performed a series of magnificent pieces that filled the rotunda's marble hall with melodies of sorrow, remembrance, and hope.

Their repertoire was enriched by the accompaniment

erous space with a blend of youthful innocence and profound maturity.

The student's solo performance served as a bridge between the historical suffering

Judge Martin Shulman said that commemorating the Holocaust counters the antisemitism on U.S. campuses.

commemorated during the event and the enduring strength of the next generation—a generation entrusted with the sacred task of remembering, teaching, and ensuring

precious items, shared with attendees in the grand rotunda of the courthouse, offered an intimate glimpse into the lives of Jewish refugees who fled Nazi persecution in Europe

and found a temporary haven in Shanghai during World War II.

Gratitude was especially extended to Rabbi Shalom Friedman, Director and CEO of AAMM, Eli Kleinman, Founder and President of AAMM, and their dedicated staff.

Their efforts in curating and transporting these invaluable historical pieces helped to anchor the remembrance ceremony in tangible memory, reminding all who attended of the real human lives behind the statistics and stories of survival.

The program's success also owed much to the leadership of the Jewish Lawyers Guild: Avram Turkel, Esq., President of the Guild, and Alyssa Grzesh, Esq., Vice President, as both played central roles in planning and overseeing the event.

A special acknowledgment was given to the program co-chairs, Judge Shulman, who also served as Master of Ceremonies, and Judge Deborah Kaplan, whose ongoing leadership in the courts and commitment to Holocaust memory have been widely recognized.

Their vision and stewardship ensured that the program maintained a tone of dignity, solemnity, and reflection appropriate for the occasion.

Also critical to the event's success were prominent judiciary members, Judge Adam Silvera, Judge Suzanne J. Adams, and Judge Lisa A. Sokoloff of the Supreme Court of New York County.

Their participation underscored the profound commitment of the New York State

court system to honoring Holocaust survivors and their legacy.

The legal community's contribution extended beyond the bench. Essential support came from Joan Levenson, Esq., Principal Law Clerk to Hon. Deborah Kaplan, Priva Simon, Esq., Principal Court Attorney of the Supreme Court of New York County, and Gregory Testa, Esq., Associate Court Attorney and co-chair of the Gender Fairness Committee.

Their work in coordinating logistics, managing program details, and ensuring smooth operations on the day of the event was instrumental in its seamless execution.

tical requirements of such a large-scale event.

In today's world, no major public event can succeed without a reliable and skilled technology team. Special thanks were extended to Tiffany Rosa of the Supreme Court of New York County and the exceptional technology team of Roberta Apicella, Peter May, Stephen Blomstedt, and Jason Mills.

As the echoes of the event faded into a profound silence, it was clear that the commemoration had achieved its most vital purpose: to bear witness, to honor the departed, and to reaffirm a collective commitment that the horrors of the



From left to right, the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for New York City Courts, Hon. Adam Silvera; the Deputy Chief Administrative Judge for Justice Initiatives, Hon. Edwina G. Richardson; and the Associate Justice of the Appellate Division, First Department, Hon. Martin Shulman pose for a photo after the ceremony.

of a violinist, whose delicate and mournful strains wove around the choir's harmonies, lending a haunting beauty to each composition. The combination of voices and strings created a powerful atmosphere, allowing the audience to feel the emotional depths of memory and longing viscerally.

A particular highlight of the musical portion came when a young lady soloist from the choir stepped forward. With grace and clarity, she performed a stirring solo that captivated the audience, her voice soaring through the cav-

that the lessons of the Holocaust are never forgotten.

In closing remarks and program acknowledgments, the Jewish Lawyers Guild and the Gender Fairness Committee extended heartfelt thanks to the many individuals and institutions whose collaboration and commitment made the day's powerful commemoration possible.

A centerpiece of the event was a special exhibition of Holocaust artifacts, made possible through the generous cooperation of the Amud Aish Memorial Museum (AAMM). These



The stunning acoustics of the rotunda were brought to life by the beautiful choral sound of the SAR High School Choir.

Additionally, also was recognized were the critical behind-the-scenes work of the court's administrative team, including Peter Sorrento, Chief Clerk of the Supreme Court of New York County Civil Branch, Michelle Gonsieski, and her excellent team — Naomi Ruiz, Augustine Capote, Luis Carrera, Sergio Colon, Ralph Franca, and Ahmad Jenkins.

Each played a crucial role in preparing the courthouse and managing the numerous logis-

past must never be forgotten.

In a building devoted to the pursuit of justice, the Holocaust Remembrance Commemoration at the Manhattan Supreme Court was a stirring reminder that memory itself is an act of justice—a living safeguard against the erasure of history and a call to conscience for all generations to come.

Fern Sidman is the senior news editor at the Jewish Voice.