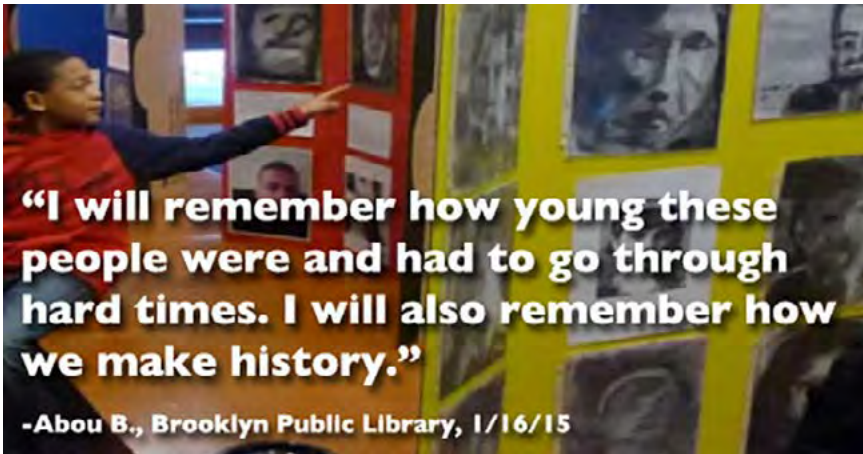


# Making a Difference: Service through art



## *The Memory Project Productions: Face-to-Face*

### *Linking the Past with the Present to Promote Historical Understanding and Compassion*

Laurie Weisman with Roz Jacobs

*In this article, educator Laurie Weisman describes her collaboration with painter Roz Jacobs on documenting the painting process and constructing a curriculum that explores how the voice of the artist can address current issues of prejudice and injustice through an examination of the past. Using the stories of families lost to the Holocaust of Nazi Germany, students investigate their own personal and family narratives.*

The Memory Project: Face-to-Face learning segment uses portraiture to connect personal narratives, past and present, through the experience of making portraits and sharing stories.

Roz Jacobs is the daughter of two Holocaust survivors. She's also a painter and an art educator. Around her 50th birthday she started to take stock of who she is and where she sits in history – both in terms of her art and her own heritage. The questions she asked herself led to a discovery that changed the course of her work.

#### **It began with a photograph**

For a few months in 2006, Jacobs had been playing with the idea of how to bring people into the painting process. Most people look at a painting and see only the end product and nothing of the struggle to arrive at what ends up on the canvas. She wanted to videotape the canvas itself as it developed, perhaps with glimpses of the palette and its changing swirls of color. "I hadn't fleshed out this idea, but I suddenly realized the subject would be my mother's younger brother, Kalman, my uncle. My mother told me a lot about what a bright child he was and how dear he was to her. He was the only person in the family



Jacobs family portrait



Enlargement of Kalman Jacob

who might have survived the war. Everyone else had been killed," Jacobs said. Though many survivors have no family photos, she was fortunate to have two photographs of Kalman. Jacobs decided for the exhibit about illuminating the painting process, she would use her Uncle Kalman as a subject.

"I envisioned videotaping myself painting Kalman nine times and making an exhibit that would juxtapose those paintings of him with nine video monitors showing the painting process in a time lapse, kaleidoscopic way." (Image below)





*A wider view of the video installation with oil paintings*

Laurie Weisman's background is in curriculum and educational media at companies like Sesame Workshop, Time For Kids and Bank Street College. "I came into the project to help with the video production, and ended up developing an entire curriculum as well as co-founding a non-profit."

"We interviewed Jacobs' mother and wove the story of their attempted escape from the Warsaw ghetto as teenagers, into the visual narrative of the developing paintings," Weisman explains. And what began with an idea for a multimedia museum exhibit led to a documentary film, a book that Jacobs wrote with her mother, and a curriculum project that's been used by thousands of people in the U.S. – translated into Polish and Hungarian and used by thousands more in Europe and Israel to date. It's a model that has been effective for students from fifth grade through university level and one that helps people deal with the past and the present in healing ways that promote communication, empathy, and resiliency.

The power of the process to engage young students was apparent at the exhibit's premier in 2006. Art teacher Carol Routman brought her students into the gallery and asked them to choose a favorite canvas, draw it, and write about their reaction to it.

## **Face to Face: Memory Project Curriculum**

### ***Launching the classroom project***

The project begins with a 10-minute video that was the prototype for the exhibit.

The screen is divided into nine sections and in each one you see a painting developing as Jacobs' mother tells the story of Kalman and their attempted escape from the Warsaw ghetto. Jacobs talk about the moment she felt her uncle. "As I painted his head for the third or fourth time, I felt him looking up at the photographer behind a big box camera in a photography studio." She felt she was reclaiming his identity and his humanity by painting him. Nazi propaganda and policies dehumanized people, stripped them of their identity and humiliated them. This creative process was about humanizing and reclaiming identity.

### ***Art Lesson in Light and Shade***

Depending on the amount of time available, we pause after the video and give students a chance to write or draw their response to the video. What images stood out to them? What did it make them think or feel? Then we show a 6-minute videotaped lesson on using charcoal and black and white pastels to make a portrait based on black and white photographs looked at upside down. Why upside down? Because we want people to focus on observation and the movement of light and shadow – not on "making a picture" or on any preconceived notions they might have.

### ***Touching the Past***

We distribute a set of "Portrait Cards." On one side are photographs of 30 people who are Holocaust survivors, victims or rescuers. Their stories are on the back. Before reading the stories, the students work on pastel portraits based on those photographs. They quickly make a ground with charcoal and then begin working with the black and white pastels – moving with the shadow and the light. We allow about 20 minutes for this activity; then students turn over the pages and see what has emerged. We ask them to share with the whole group both their portrait and something about the person and/or the experience that touched them.



### ***Connecting to the present***

In a following session, we follow a similar process but the subjects of the portraits are members of the students' own families. For homework, they choose someone to interview about a life-changing experience. They scan a photograph and make an enlargement of their subject's head in black and white. They use the upside down technique for these subjects, and then share these portraits and stories with each other. This is a very special moment as students share their struggles, courage, and resilience or joy. There are often stories of immigration, of leaving difficult situations and assimilating in new environments where they weren't always welcome. There are stories of illness, loss, and courage. The interview experience is often a discovery for the student who hadn't known these stories before. They speak of newfound respect for family members, for each other's stories and for the suffering of the people who suffered during the Holocaust.

After sharing we hand out a reflection sheet that asks students four questions:

- What was it like to spend so much time looking at a photograph and making a portrait based on it?
- What do you think you will remember about this experience?
- Do you think it's important to understand the experience of your ancestors? Of other people's ancestors? Why or why not?
- What did you like and dislike about the art experience?





For closure, we divide the class into small groups and each is given a display panel. They use the portraits they made, come up with a title for their panel and captions for each image. Then they become the tour guides for their classmates and explain each panel. When the exhibit involves a reception, with guides, families are very moved to have their children share their stories.

Excerpts from the student reflections on participating in the Memory Project:  
*I felt connected to the unknown victims.*  
 Jordan R., Florida Holocaust Museum

*My understanding is no longer about the amount of people killed in the Holocaust, but about the lives and precious moments each individual contributed to the world.*  
 Jorge A., Manhattan College



*Being able to put faces to stories...I felt connected with the person after drawing them.*  
 Jenny B., Manhattan College

*I really, truly enjoyed this project. I also loved hearing about my classmates' experiences. I never really knew how much I don't know my classmates. It has taught me not to assume I know everything about someone.*  
 Tonya K., Gr. 10, New York, NY

*What I learned about my friend's experience, which relates to the Holocaust, is that no matter what happens, keep trying to go on.*  
 Brian S., Gr.10, New York, NY



*I thought the entire process was really cool because when I was interviewing my mom, she got really emotional about some things and laughed about others. I felt like there was a new connection between my mom and I, and my mom and her family.*  
 Morgan J., Gr. 10, New York, NY

*I think that the connection of art to history is very important because it can help you visualize things more. Also, when you are actually doing something you are able to form even a deeper connection to the subject, or at least I am personally, because you are doing something with your hands as well as your mind.*  
 Ariel C., Gr. 10, New York, NY



*I will remember how to draw upside down. I will remember this because it made drawing easy and helped me to make it look better.*  
 Thomas M., Whitesville Central School, NY

**Connecting Past and Present**

It's not a big leap to make connections to current events. It seems to me that the more we know each other and discover our commonalities, the better we'll be able to communicate and take better care of each other as a community and ultimately as a nation. Making these portraits and linking the past with the present is a potent tool for communication and community.

**Resources**

Free curriculum materials including the videos, Portrait Cards and curriculum guide can be downloaded at [memoryprojectproductions.com](http://memoryprojectproductions.com)

We encourage you to use the project and send your work to us to become part of the International Portrait Gallery. <http://memoryprojectproductions.com/remembrance-portraits/>

***“Making these portraits and linking the past with the present is a potent tool for communication and community.”***

Participating teachers will become Memory Project Ambassadors promoting creativity and compassion. We'll send a certificate and create a community page on our website for your school so you can share your work and stories. We also offer workshops for a fee for schools or districts. You can contact us for more information. <http://memoryprojectproductions.com/community/>



Laurie Weisman has had a 30-year career in educational publishing, leading teams that created award-winning programs at Sesame Workshop, Scholastic, Time for Kids and at Bank Street College of Education. She has a Masters in Museum Education from Bank Street College.

Roz Jacobs is a New York City painter whose work is exhibited in galleries and museums around the world. Her film projects include the award-winning "Finding Kalman". Her book, *Finding Kalman: A Boy in Six Million*, co-written with her mother Anna Jacobs, was published by Abingdon Square Publishing and released as an e-book by Pearson.



Together, Weisman and Jacobs launched non-profit Memory Project Productions in 2008, and created its exhibits, programs, website, and the film *Finding Kalman*. They lead Memory Project workshops around the world.

# MEMBERSHIP

## Why Your NYSATA Membership Matters



### **NYSATA NEEDS YOU!**

Your support, through your individual and district membership, helps to sustain the organization. We need your professional expertise, creativity, and willingness to serve to assure art education remains strong in our public schools. Becoming a member and getting involved at the local level allows you to take a more active role in the future of art education.

### **YOU NEED NYSATA!**

There is much to be gained from belonging to a professional organization such as NYSATA. The Mission of NYSATA is to promote and advocate for excellence in art education throughout New York State. NYSATA works for you in numerous ways:

#### **STRONG ADVOCACY:**

NYSATA has served as watchdog for visual art education in New York State for 68 years! NYSATA has been integral in the establishment of mandated art education at all levels and in the development and now revision of the state standards for the visual arts. NYSATA's vigilance and advocacy efforts have kept the existing mandate for visual art at the Middle Level and High school intact. NYSATA sponsored art exhibits such as the NYS School Boards Show and the NYSATA Legislative Exhibit, and programs such as the Portfolio Project and the Olympics of the Visual Arts are advocacy tools that showcase the work of many students throughout the state.

*Powerful teacher networks can be a way to make professional connections that not only support your career, but also enable powerful change, encourage growth, and ultimately make your classroom a better place.*

*Scholastic Inc. Contributor Megan Everette*

#### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

Whether it is on a local level in each region or at the state level, NYSATA (who is now an approved CTLE provider) offers discipline specific professional development for visual art educators. Many regions offer workshops, and seminars, as well as gallery and artist studio visits. NYSATA's annual conference provides members a chance to see nationally recognized artists and experts in the field of art and art education. At the conference, we offer over 100 workshops that focus on advancing the profession, as well as development of artistic and intellectual skills. There are vendor exhibits, student and member exhibits, as well as round-table discussions. In addition, NYSATA is working together with other organizations and with higher education pre-service programs to bring more opportunities for professional growth to our members.

#### **RESOURCES & INITIATIVES:**

NYSATA provides members with many resources. Through professional development offerings, the NYSATA website, and the award winning *NYSATA News*, members can learn about current trends in art education and pedagogy. Programs such as Camp Sagamore Summer Institute, The NYSATA Portfolio Project, and The Olympics of The Visual Arts, NYSATA offers many learning opportunities for students and members alike. The Portfolio project is a NYS standards based assessment process that provides students with an opportunity to present specific directed portfolios at regional adjudication sites. OVA is an exciting and challenging opportunity for art students to demonstrate their creativity, ingenuity and critical thinking skills in friendly competition. The Summer Institute at Camp Sagamore offers members a week long opportunity to renew their creative spirits and re-energize themselves in a beautiful natural setting.