



ALABAMA
HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION
CENTER

Finding Fresh Perspective



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This past week, I had the opportunity to spend a few days at the beach with my family. It has always been my happy place. A place where I can slow down, breathe a little deeper, and regain perspective. There is something about standing at the edge of the water that immediately changes the way I see the world.

Every time I watch the waves roll in, I am reminded of both the vastness and the power of the ocean. It has a way of making life's daily frustrations seem smaller while, at the same time, reminding me that each of our lives carries tremendous significance.

As I sat watching the waves come and go, I found myself thinking about the work we do every day in Holocaust education.

At first glance, the connection may not seem obvious. One is a place of extraordinary beauty. The other asks us to confront one of history's darkest chapters. Yet both invite us to look beyond ourselves.

The ocean teaches humility. No matter how accomplished we become or how much control we believe we have, standing before something so immense and powerful reminds us that we are only one person in a much larger story.

History teaches a similar lesson.

When we look to the Holocaust, we quickly realize that history was not shaped only by political leaders or military commanders. It was shaped by ordinary people. By neighbors who chose to help. Or chose not to help. By teachers who chose to teach real stories. By parents who raised children to value the dignity of every human being. By communities that decided what they would accept and what they would refuse to tolerate.

One person may seem small against the backdrop of something so vast. Yet history reminds us that the choices made by millions of ordinary individuals ultimately determines the direction of a society.

As I watched the waves, another thought came to mind. Some waves are so powerful that they can knock you off your feet. Others are gentle enough to jump over or ride back to shore with immense joy.

Our world can feel much the same way.

The constant stream of headlines, social media, and misinformation can leave us feeling overwhelmed, as though we are being pulled by currents beyond our control. But if we choose to look carefully, we will find people quietly (or loudly) making a difference every day. We see the educators who inspire critical thinking, students who choose empathy over indifference, neighbors who extend kindness, and volunteers who serve our communities.

Those choices mean something and they go farther than we may ever realize.

The words we speak, the assumptions we challenge, the stories we tell, and the way we treat someone all extend far beyond the moment. They may reach people we may never meet.

That is why Holocaust education matters so deeply.

Our goal is to teach historical facts AND to help people recognize the humanity in one another before stereotypes become prejudice, before prejudice becomes discrimination, before discrimination becomes hatred, and before hatred becomes violence or maybe even something worse.

Every classroom conversation is an opportunity to strengthen empathy, encourage critical thinking, and cultivate the moral courage to choose what is right, even when it is difficult.

As I watched my family laughing together on the beach, I was reminded that the kind of world we hope to build is rarely shaped by one extraordinary moment. More often, it is built through countless ordinary moments when we choose respect over fear, curiosity over judgment, and compassion over indifference. It can become extraordinary when we choose to think differently.

One afternoon, my grandson looked at me after a wave washed away the sandcastle he had worked so hard to build. He asked why the ocean had taken it away.

I told him something that surprised even me: "It gave you the chance to build another one."

That simple moment reminded me that while we cannot change what has already happened, we can decide what we will build next.

We have work to do. More teachers to equip. More students to inspire. More dinner table conversations to have. More opportunities to remind one another that every person possesses worth and value.

I returned from vacation rested, but more importantly, renewed.

Sometimes the greatest gift is not escaping from our work but finding a fresh perspective that reminds us why it matters.



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