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Jewish Family and Children's Services

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### **BAY AREA HIGH SCHOOLERS WORK WITH LOCAL HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND POLISH GENEALOGISTS ON THE “NEXT CHAPTER”**

SAN FRANCISCO –Bay Area Holocaust survivors issued a challenge to Poland, their country of origin: they wanted to know why they should care about the country that ceased to care about them. This challenge served as the inspiration for a new project where 13 Bay Area high school students spent the last seven months interviewing and befriending local Holocaust survivors, while working with Polish genealogists. On Friday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, the survivors will receive the essays the students wrote about them and contemporary research about their hometowns, original documents from their lives in Poland and information about the revival of Jewish life there today.

*The Next Chapter*, a partnership of Jewish Family and Children's Services and the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture, in cooperation with Congregation Emanu-El and the Holocaust Center of Northern California, sponsored the project. They paired 13 Polish Bay Area Holocaust survivors with 13 local teens to help the next generation become “witness” by learning directly from the people who lived through this horrific period of world and Jewish history. But the project went further. It created a new bridge between the Bay Area and contemporary Poland, through the research provided by the Warsaw Jewish Historical Institute and the Taube Foundation's Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland.

The project opened the eyes of all who participated to the current revitalization of Jewish life in Poland, a message of hope and progress both surprising and profound.

Since October 2007, the teens have interviewed the survivors about their lives, while doing research on Polish history and Holocaust history with researchers in Poland. The project will culminate with the program on May 9<sup>th</sup>, where the students will present the survivors with a “book” containing research about their hometowns in Poland, including current initiatives to

preserve Jewish life. In addition, the books will include original documents from the survivors' lives, such as an ID card from the year 1931 and a residency registration application from 1935 for one of the participants. Very few of the survivors have returned to Poland since the war, and so the books will serve as a window to the homes they left behind.

“As the number of survivors dwindle, it will become increasingly difficult for future generations to connect to their stories,” said Dr. Anita Friedman, Executive Director of Jewish Family and Children’s Services. “The Next Chapter project creates a new generation of witnesses who will keep the voices and perspectives of the survivors alive.”

Many of the students have formed friendships with the survivors that will continue beyond the conclusion of the program.

Nataly Man, a student at Jewish Community High School in San Francisco, described her experience. “I was in awe listening to Henry Libicki’s story,” she said. “He told me about how after he was liberated, he came face to face with an S.S. officer that had brutally beaten him. The officer was unarmed, and Henry could have killed him, but Henry is not a murderer. Instead, he kicked the soldier and ran. I really enjoyed getting to know Henry – listening to his Stories – and I plan to keep visiting with him.”

Beyond linking generations, the Next Chapter Project seeks to reconnect these Polish survivors, many of whom feel betrayed by Poland, to their heritage and show them that Jewish life has returned to Poland.

“Poland has changed considerably since these survivors left,” said Tad Taube, chairman of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture and honorary consul to Poland. “My hope in supporting the Next Chapter Project is to show people that Poland’s Jewish community is once again thriving, and to help heal the wounds of those who left in the wake of the Holocaust and subsequent Communist crackdowns,” he said.

The students will present the survivors with their books at a special program on Friday, May 9, 2008 at 6:30 p.m. at the Jewish Family and Children’s Services office at 2150 Post Street. Media coverage is welcome. For more information, please contact Taylor Epstein, YouthFirst Program Coordinator, JFCS, at 415-359-2463.

WHO: Bay Area Holocaust survivors and local high school students

WHAT: The Next Chapter Project culmination program

WHEN: May 9, 2008, 6:30 p.m.

WHERE: Jewish Family and Children’s Services  
2150 Post Street  
San Francisco, CA  
(between Scott and Pierce)