

Cremona-Crema, Italy  
La Giornata Della Memoria-  
International Holocaust Remembrance Day

January 27, 2020

Cremona is a city of 85,000 inhabitants, in Northern Italy, 70 km from Milano. It is primarily known as the city where Antonio Stradivari crafted his famous violins. Other well-known craftsmen also created stringed instruments there.

Today, there still are violin makers in Cremona, and the Stradivari School of Design operates as well as a museum of stringed instruments of which the city is very proud.

I am familiar with the city. Between 1945 and 1948, there was a DP (refugee) camp for Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Cremona. My parents and I stayed there. For a time, I had been in the Youth Aliya children's home, in the nearby village of Selvino. However, after my father died in Cremona in December 1945, I returned to Cremona to be with my mother until the spring of 1948, when the two of us immigrated to Canada.

Many years later after I met and became friends with a young architect, Angelo Garioni, I became a frequent visitor to that city. Angelo was writing a paper for a book about the complex in which the camp had been situated. I was also introduced to a number of community leaders, and particularly to a woman, Ilde Botolli, a former teacher, who was a volunteer at the provincial school board, in charge of Shoah and Genocide education in the [province](#). Professoressa Botolli was put in charge of Shoah and Genocide education for the region. She not only organized annual trips of high school students to concentration camps in Germany and Austria but also guided the groups. She was particularly determined for the students to learn about the gruesome atrocities perpetrated by the government of the German 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich.

I was invited many times by local teachers to tell my story of survival to their students as well as to talk about the wonderful postwar welcome, affection and respect, which we Survivors received from the local Christian population of Cremona.

I also met and became friends with two librarians, Monica Feraboli and Roberta Aglio, who are employed by the 'Biblioteca del Seminario Vescovile'. They

undertook to supervise the Italian translation of my Memoir, 'My Silent Pledge', that was published in English by Guernica in 2013.

In September, 2019, I received an e-mail from Professoressa Botolli, inviting me for the 27th of January 2020, the 'International Holocaust Remembrance Day – La Giornata Della Mempria', to deliver a Survivor's testimony, to 1,200 high school students in various locations in the city of Cremona and Crema. Since I had learned Italian during my teen years in Cremona and am still fluent in the language, I was honoured to accept the invitation. I remained in Cremona from January 26<sup>th</sup> till January 29<sup>th</sup>.

The following is a summary and commentary, written in Italian by Ilde Botolli, and translated into English:

"Dearest Sidney;

First of all, THANK YOU!

I am sure I can speak on behalf of almost two thousand students, teachers and citizens of Cremona and Crema.

The words about Cremona comforted us and will help us not to forget that Cremona was a generous city, welcoming to those who arrived at the DP camp with a heavy burden of heartbreaking memories and humiliating and murderous persecutions for the mere fact of being Jewish.

Today we really need to remember, because unfortunately hate campaigns were unleashed also in Italy by far-right political forces and fuelled by an offensive and humiliating, racist, and Antisemitic daily language, which worry us a lot.

The schedule of your meetings was very busy.

Sunday 26 January, after a long journey, you arrived in Malpensa at 8:30 am. On the same day, at 5:30 pm in the 'Salone dei Quadri' of the City Hall, your first meeting with Cremona was waiting for you for the presentation of your book, 'My Silent Pledge', My Journey of Struggle, Survival and Memory, translated into Italian thanks to the efforts of Monica Feraboli and Roberta Aglio of the 'Biblioteca del Seminario Vescovile.

We will be able to re-read your words, we will be able to deepen the knowledge of your history, your family and the Jewish community of Siemiatycze, the Polish town where your family lived and where you were born and lived the first eight years of your childhood, before hell broke loose. Gianluca Galimberti, the Mayor of Cremona who already considers you a Cremonese, was very happy to welcome you,

underlining the meaning and the importance of your presence in Cremona, for the testimony you are bearer and for the love that you saved for our city. This was only the prologue... The meetings with the students of all the high schools of Cremona and Crema had a great meaning for all of them, for their teachers and for all of us.

On Monday, January 27<sup>th</sup>, 'International Holocaust Remembrance Day', you met in Cremona, in the "J. Torriani" Institute of Education, about 1,200 high school students from Cremona. From 8:30 to 10:00, the aula magna packed with children and teachers listened with great respect and emotion to your testimony, in Italian. There were also about seventy students, from Torriani in the Varalli classroom, who followed you online because there was no more room. Tiziano Zanisi, President of the National Association of the Acqui Division of Cremona, and I, as head of the Memory Project, were close to you, to support you while you recalled with great pain, the great suffering of you, your family and your community that was destroyed in Treblinka, the terrible extermination camp for Polish Jews and beyond.

On Monday afternoon at the CGIL union headquarters you met, in addition to the union leaders of CGIL-CISL-UIL and the representatives of the "By Train For The Memory" committee, which every year organizes a train to Auschwitz for students and workers from Lombardy and also children of a middle school.

On Tuesday January 28<sup>th</sup>, in Crema you again met 600 students and teachers from high schools in that city. And back again on Wednesday morning in Cremona, you met the students of the I.I.S. "Antonio Stradivari", the famous violin-making school.

Your words have made me reflect a lot and ask many questions, including on the present situation and man's ability to do evil, but also good.

I hope you are well, and that Florida will restore you to good health, ready for your new great commitment that awaits you in April.

Thanks Sidney. It was very nice for me and Francesco to be able to stay close to you and share these intense days together.

A great big hug,

Ilde and Francesco.

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After leaving Cremona on January 29<sup>th</sup>, I spent 5 days in Milano that included a trip to the village of Selvino, where I visited the recently opened museum of the former 'Youth Aliya' children's home where I spent 9 months in 1945-1946.

On Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, I boarded the plane that was going to take me, to Montreal. My thoughts kept racing back to my activities of my trip. In reality it was not just a trip. It was a 'Mission'. A very successful mission. I am also very grateful for being given the opportunity.

MILLE GRAZIE, ILDE.