

University of Worcester**Honorary Doctorate Citation for Mindu Hornick****8 November 2018**

Pro Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Distinguished Guests, Graduands, and Graduands' Guests, I am delighted to introduce you to MINDU HORNICK.

For the past decade, Mindu has worked to educate young people about the Holocaust, based on her own personal experience. Mindu Hornick was deported to Auschwitz concentration camp in 1942, at the age of 12, along with her mother, sister and two brothers. As a Holocaust survivor, Mindu has shared her story with students and teachers in a range of educational settings, bringing a personal reality to the history of World War II, and challenging students to consider their own responses to atrocity and conflict in more recent times.

Mindu was born in the former Czechoslovakia in 1929 to a happy Jewish family. They lived in a small town with a Jewish community of about 30 families. Mindu and her older sister Baylu were the only survivors of her family – and possibly of the entire community into which she was born.

Mindu and her sister were interned in a ghetto, in the concentration camp, and then at a labour camp serving an armaments factory between Bremen and Hamburg. On arrival at Auschwitz, she was advised to say she was older than she really was, making it more likely that she would be put to work – advice which almost certainly saved her life. It was only very recently that Mindu discovered that there were in fact 84 such slave labour camps making munitions, bricks, and parachutes. The quality of the air was a little fresher at the labour camp, in contrast with the toxic fumes of the crematoria at Auschwitz; the internees at the labour camp were also fed a little better to sustain them as working slaves. These small differences were in all likelihood the margin between death and life, enabling Mindu to survive and tell her story.

Mindu and Baylu, along with other prisoners of Auschwitz, were liberated in 1945 by the British army; the sisters were taken to a village on the Baltic Sea to recuperate. After some months, they returned to Prague, through the United Nations, in the hope of finding some

family. They found an aunt and uncle, also survivors, who cared for Mindu and her sister, as the two youngest remaining members of the family. In Prague they were able to catch up with the education of which war and internment had deprived them.

In 1948 the political situation in Czechoslovakia was increasingly strained and volatile, due to Soviet intervention; the Czech coup marked the rapid ascendancy of Soviet influence in eastern Europe, alarming the Western powers and contributing to the partition of Germany and the escalation of the Cold War. As the borders closed, Mindu and her sister were again made refugees, once again experiencing the terror of persecution, and the dread of being separated from each other. Just two among the countless vulnerable people whose life-stories have been affected by the brutality of geopolitical events.

In England, a Dr Schoenfeld had realised that refugee children remained at risk after the liberation of the camps. He persuaded the UK government to facilitate the rescue of war orphans of Jewish parents, and to bring them to England and be placed with Jewish families, so that they would not lose their cultural identity. In order to get a place on the last transport of Eastern European war orphans to England, with a guarantee that another aunt and uncle living in Birmingham would take care of her, Mindu was forced to become Stateless, and had to be separated from her sister and her family for financial reasons. Mindu's sister Baylu went to live with other family in Australia.

Once she felt more secure, Mindu reconnected with Judaism and became part of the community in Birmingham. Three years later, she met her future husband, Alan, married and had two daughters, and in time two grandchildren whom she cherishes. She is well supported by family in the cathedral this afternoon. Mindu has now lived in Birmingham for 70 years.

Like many survivors, for years afterwards Mindu was not able to speak about what happened in the terrible years of the Nazi occupation of Europe and the Holocaust. She felt even until the 1970s that few people wanted to hear about survivors' experiences. The repair and regeneration of Europe, it seemed, left little space for serious reflection about the past. But there was a gradual increase in the publication of personal testimony and literature about the Holocaust – books such as *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Primo Levi's *If this is a Man*, Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark*, and Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*; and films such as

Schindler's List, *Sophie's Choice*, and *Shoah*. The Second World War and the Holocaust gradually became fundamental to school history curricula in Britain.

Mindu came to feel that it was important for survivors to come forward, as credible witnesses, to support the historical documentation of the atrocities of the twentieth century, and help future generations to learn and to remember. And for the last 15 years, Mindu has devoted her time to lecturing at schools and universities, to interviews and media work. She works with the Anne Frank Foundation and the Holocaust Education Trust, promoting the simple but difficult truth that it is wrong to stand by whilst others are persecuted. She works with children's and old age charities; she is part of an organisation called Nisa Nashim, a group working with Muslim women to promote better relations, understanding, and respect. She is also a member of EWZ, a charity which supports deprived children and battered wives. Mindu passionately believes that everyone should be respected, appreciated, and treated with loving care, and that the consequences of hatred are catastrophic.

As a resident of the West Midlands for over half a century, it is appropriate to acknowledge Mindu's contribution both to the region, and more widely, through her voluntary and educational work. The Worcester community has benefited from this work: Mindu has addressed events at university partner schools and colleges, and the University's own commemorative event for Holocaust Memorial Day.

Mindu's story resonates with the University of Worcester's mission to make a difference in society and to provide our students – especially the teachers of the future – with an evidence-informed, transformational experience of education that supports the development of their own world-views and values. The post-war programme of re-building gave the university its original mission – to help to 'win the peace' through education. And now, over 70 years later, the principle of education to promote peace, understanding, and equality is still at the heart of the university's values.

Mindu Hornick embodies these values, and she is the kind of teacher that we need, because it is by no means easy to learn from atrocity and suffering on a huge scale.

The German philosopher Theodor Adorno famously stated: ‘To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today.’¹ Art and culture cannot do justice to human suffering on a massive scale, it is true. But in this view, it’s as if the knowledge that the Holocaust took place makes us incapable of or unworthy of art and culture, and unable even to understand why.

I am also reminded of a striking passage in a novel by the British writer Alasdair Reynolds, in which a cynical academic is considering a disaster with great loss of life: ‘A splendidly inept thing [...] the human capacity for grief. It just isn’t capable of providing an adequate emotional response once the dead exceed a few dozen in number. And it doesn’t just level off—it just gives up, resets itself to zero.’²

The philosopher and the cynic both indicate the huge difficulty of imagining the crimes and the suffering of the Holocaust. And they are both wrong; they have to be. We must use education and culture to feel empathy with the victims of atrocity, outrage for the perpetrators, and to apply that learning to our own lives. That’s why Mindu and her generation are precious to us: they help us to understand and to learn, with their personal witness and testimony.

If we are afraid and troubled by the volatile nature of global politics in the twenty-first century... If we are sometimes drawn into intolerance or anger with those who disagree with us... If we are tired of the meanness of political debate on social media, which seems to produce more heat than light... If we have seen that film clip of people burning an effigy of the Grenfell Tower, and felt both revulsion and shame... And if we do want peace... Then we have an opportunity today, to be quiet and listen to the words of someone who was really there, who can truly teach us.

¹ Theodor Adorno, ‘Cultural Criticism and Society’, *Prisms* (1955), trans. by Samuel and Shierry Weber: https://moodle.ufsc.br/pluginfile.php/1407246/mod_resource/content/1/Theodor%20W.%20Adorno%20Prisms%20%28Studies%20in%20Contemporary%20German%20Social%20Thought%29.pdf [accessed 5 November 2018]

² Alasdair Reynolds, *Revelation Space* (London: Orion, 2000), p. ?.

But before we do that, let us conclude the brief formality of presenting Mindu with her honorary award from the University of Worcester...

Pro Chancellor, on behalf of Academic Board, I present to you Mindu Hornick for the award of an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters.