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‘Adolf Eichmann’ exhibit makes last stop in United States at Holocaust Memorial Center

By: Jonathan Shead



Attendees at the Holocaust Memorial Center view artifacts and memorabilia that is part of the “Operation Finale: The Capture and Trial of Adolf Eichmann” exhibit. *Photo by Jonathan Shead*

FARMINGTON HILLS — A special exhibit has traveled across the world and is now stationed at the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills.

“Operation Finale: The Capture & Trial of Adolf Eichmann” tells the story of the 1961 capture and trial by Mossad — an Israeli intelligence agency that was only 12 years old at the time — of known Holocaust perpetrator Adolf Eichmann for the atrocities he committed.

“He was responsible for organizing the deportation of millions of Jews. He was the logistics expert in (the Holocaust),” said Ruth Bergmann, the director of education at the Holocaust Memorial Center.

The carefully calculated capture of Eichmann spanned over a year before he was put to trial in front of the Israeli state and the survivors he once harmed. Eichmann was eventually sentenced to death for his crimes. He was the only member of the Nazi party to ever face public trial.

The exhibit tells the story not of revenge by the Israelis, but of justice. Through the pursuit of justice, and the evidence collected to seek it, the exhibit — deemed a spy story — allows viewers to learn about the Holocaust through a new lens.

“It’s a very compelling story. I think that it’s a chapter of larger Holocaust stories that people don’t know about yet, and it’s a way of teaching all of our values through a thrilling, interesting and different venue than normal. You’ve got the whole spy piece of it, the Mossad, the intrigue, and yet those very valuable lessons are there.

“This is a human story. It’s about finding justice against crimes committed. Yes, in this case, against the Jews, but we want all people to have empathy and connect with the story,” Bergmann said.

Lori Ellis, a West Bloomfield resident who attended the exhibit opening Jan. 26, learned something from the exhibit and about her family. Both Ellis’ mother and late father are survivors of Auschwitz.

“I was reading that before Eichmann’s trial in Israel, no one spoke about the Holocaust.

It brought back an analogy to me, because before my dad and mom’s friend passed away, my parents never spoke about the Holocaust in the house,” she said. “That was pretty powerful when the trial happened, and people finally shared their horrific experiences.”

Ellis said her mother eventually opened up about her life story, and that’s what ultimately “provoked” her to learn more about the Holocaust. Her mother is part of the Holocaust Memorial Center’s survivor speaker series.

Through an authentically replicated bullet-proof glass booth where Eichmann stood during the trial, and where exhibit visitors can now watch the trial unfold as if they were in the courtroom, Ellis also learned how much evil one person could carry.

“You can see in direct parallel the emotional testimonials of the witnesses and the cold, inhuman face of Eichmann, who denied responsibility to the end, the true face of evil,” Patrick Gallagher, the president of exhibit producers Gallagher & Associates, wrote in an email.

That’s exactly the lesson Bergmann and the Holocaust Memorial Center staff want viewers to take away.

“It’s a great way for us to reinforce the idea of individuals and individual choices, because it wasn’t the state or the Nazi party that committed these crimes,” she said. “The Holocaust was not inevitable. It happened because people made choices. . . . We all make choices in our lives. We have the responsibility to stand up to injustice and take action.”



The exhibit “Operation Finale: The Capture and Trial of Adolf Eichmann” is open at the Holocaust Memorial Center through June 7.

As Ellis headed home after the program, she was left with “mixed emotions” about the exhibit.

“I could see and feel the horror, but in a sense, it was liberating,” she said, holding back tears. “I felt like justice was served for 6 million people. Not just for my family, but for everybody.”

The exhibit is currently open to the public at the Holocaust Memorial Center through June 7. It is included with general admission to the museum. This will notably be the last time the exhibit is shown in the United States. From here, it will make its way to Europe before returning home to Israel.

With so much information to digest from the exhibit as viewers walk through, Gallagher said, visitors won’t want to miss any important details.

“Dedicate time to read, watch and listen,” he said. “This is not a show to skim your way through.”

For more information, visit holocaustcenter.org.