

Stockton's 'Father of Holocaust Studies,' Dr. Murray Kohn, Honored for Teaching as Witness

Rabbi, Author and Holocaust Survivor Entered Auschwitz at Age 12

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Galloway Township, NJ - Nearly 100 faculty, staff, students, former students and community members gathered tonight to celebrate the impactful teachings of Dr. Murray Kohn, who is retiring at the end of this academic year. Dr. Kohn, associate professor of Holocaust Studies at Stockton University and Rabbi Emeritus of Beth Israel Congregation of Vineland, NJ, was honored for his 26 years of service and leadership in Holocaust and Jewish Studies at a reception on Stockton's main Galloway campus.

Dr. Yitzhak Sharon, professor of Physics at Stockton and Weinstein Professor of Jewish Studies, emceed the event, praising "the man of the hour, the man of the decade."

"Murray is the father of Holocaust Studies at Stockton. Thanks to him, Stockton now has a thriving undergraduate program, minor, Master's program, and Holocaust Resource Center. Over the years, he made everyone understand how important it is to teach Holocaust Studies," Dr. Sharon said.

Steve Marcus, a former student and 2002 graduate of the Master of Arts in Holocaust and Genocide Studies program, read an open letter to Dr. Kohn:

"You are a prominent, intelligent and funny man whose intensity, knowledge, scholarship, humor, dashing good looks and command for Yiddish border on astonishing... All who have been touched by you are honored."

Dr. Michael Berenbaum, a world-renowned scholar, author, former project director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. and a former Ida E. King Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton, gave the keynote address.

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Dr. Berenbaum emphasized Dr. Kohn's "teaching as a witness," telling the history of the Holocaust from the perspective of truth and using a 'holy anger' against injustice.

"Murray used his anger to fuel an understanding – the rage that all must feel when they confront the Holocaust. He used his experiences to recreate Jewish life in Vineland, and he had the enormous privilege of creating a community that nourished and healed," Dr. Berenbaum said. "He deepened those teachings with a second career, teaching another generation, and he insisted on honesty, integrity and holy rage... We all learned by what was said but also what was not said, and what was shared in silence."

Dr. Kohn addressed the crowd saying, "Sometimes I wonder - what is the cost of survival? When I survived, I questioned: what is my responsibility in the future?"

This 'garbage' - Anti-Semitism - is still polluting the world, he explained.

"The world owes me everything. I have paid ahead of time. Never for a moment could I forget my people, my suffering, my Jewish history... All of my life, I have dedicated to my loved ones. I call every survivor my brother and my sister. It is our obligation to ourselves and to everything not to forget. Don't you ever forget; remember in your own ways," he said.

Many members of the Beth Israel Congregation were in attendance, including Mark and Susan Kutner of Vineland. The couple has known Rabbi Kohn for more than 40 years.

"He married us and has been in our lives ever since," said Susan Kutner. "He has touched our lives in so many ways and we are so honored to be celebrating him now."

Dr. Robert Gregg, dean of General Studies at Stockton, said it was a "very intense experience" working with Dr. Kohn over the years.

"I learned from students about Murray's spellbinding courses and saw for myself his incredibly insightful worldview. The loss to Stockton is incalculable and we hope Murray stays in contact with us. We hope he remains an ambassador to us so that South Jersey can benefit from his great wisdom," he said.

Dr. Kohn entered Auschwitz - Birkenau in November 1942, when he was 12 years old. He was freed on May 8, 1945, at Theresienstadt and came to the United States at the end of 1950.

He is a graduate of Brooklyn College and Teachers Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary and was ordained as Rabbi in 1959. He received his Doctorate in Jewish Literature from Jewish Teachers Seminary-People's University in New York City and his Doctorate in Divinity from Jewish Theological Seminary. He is also a Fellow of the Hebrew University.

Rabbi Kohn served in the pulpit for over 40 years, mostly at Beth Israel Congregation. He was the first professor of Holocaust Studies at what was then The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, and has continued teaching the undergraduate and the master's program as associate professor.

The reception was sponsored by the university's Department of Jewish Studies.

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