

Washington National Cathedral Adds Stone Carving of Holocaust Survivor Elie Wiesel to Its Human Rights Porch



Left: Carving process of *Elie Wiesel's* head at the Washington National Cathedral. Right: *Elie Wiesel's* head posted at the Washington National Cathedral.

Photos: Washington National Cathedral.

Washington National Cathedral formally dedicated a new stone carving of Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel on Tuesday, October 12, 2021. The carving, which was completed in April 2021, shows Wiesel's likeness inside the Cathedral's Human Rights Porch, which features carvings of leading human rights defenders throughout history. The dedication is a collaboration among the Cathedral, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity.

Elie Wiesel's legacy is being honored at the Washington National Cathedral as a lifelong human rights defender dedicated to combating indifference and intolerance. A survivor of Auschwitz and Buchenwald camps, Wiesel told his story to millions through his autobiographical novel *Night*, bringing the horrors of the Holocaust into stark focus for the world. The carving was done in place by the Cathedral's stonemasons, and has been conceived with the involvement of the Wiesel family.

Wiesel joins the likenesses of, among others, Rosa Parks, Mother Teresa, Jonathan Daniels and Eleanor Roosevelt on the Cathedral's Human Rights Porch, which is dedicated to individuals who have taken significant, profound and life-changing actions in the fight for human rights, social justice, civil rights, and the welfare of other human beings. Throughout his life, Wiesel used his voice to try to confront gross human rights abuses and prevent genocide, understanding that taking action early could prevent others from suffering the same fate that befell millions of Jews during the Holocaust.

"Elie Wiesel's life is an extraordinary testimony to the indomitable human spirit and the triumph of love of thy neighbor over hatred and fear, even amidst the darkest and most devastating periods of human history," said The

Very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, dean of Washington National Cathedral. "From the depths of cruelty inflicted on him, his family, and so many millions of Jews and others during the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel went on to dedicate his life to the pursuit of human rights, and to heed the lessons of history. We are humbled to welcome his likeness to the Cathedral, and pray that his example and legacy will be a blessing and an inspiration to all who enter."

The announcement of Wiesel's inclusion in the Cathedral's Human Rights Porch comes during a time of rising antisemitism in the United States and around the world. The presence of Wiesel's likeness alongside other prominent human rights defenders from multiple faith traditions underscores the Cathedral's commitment to standing up against hatred, bigotry and antisemitism. Inspired by Wiesel's life's work and legacy, the Cathedral is committed to sustained interfaith dialogue and action to ensure the progress that he fought for in life is protected.

"Throughout his life, Elie devoted himself tirelessly to preserving the memory of the victims of the Holocaust and working to ensure that other communities do not suffer the same fate," said Marion Wiesel, widow of Elie Wiesel and vice president of the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity. "Not only does his presence in the National Cathedral memorialize his life and honor his commitment to human rights; it also ensures that new generations will learn from his teachings and carry the lessons of his life forward into the future."

"Like millions of European Jews, Elie suffered unimaginable horrors. But he responded to that suffering by devoting his life to writing, teaching, and above all as a moral leader and tireless advocate for our common

humanity," said Sara Bloomfield, director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "That his likeness is now included with others, from many backgrounds, who share these ideals is a fitting tribute to his lasting legacy."

While there are many representations of biblical figures from the Hebrew scriptures represented in the Cathedral, Wiesel is the first person from the modern-day Jewish community to be added. His inclusion represents the Cathedral's mission to be a house of prayer for all people and a sacred space for the nation to gather. And his place on the Cathedral's Human Rights Porch will serve as an indelible reminder of the necessity of speaking out against hatred in all its forms - the same cause that Wiesel dedicated his life to.

Wiesel was born in Romania in 1928, and in 1944 his family was sent by the Nazis to the Auschwitz and Buchenwald camps, where his father, mother and sister were killed. After the camps were liberated, Wiesel went on to a prolific career as a writer, ultimately authoring 57 books, including *Night*, about his experiences during the Holocaust. He was a vocal advocate for human rights causes around the world, and served as a professor at Boston University, which created the Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies in his honor. He was the founding chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC, and won numerous awards throughout his life, including the Nobel Peace Prize, Presidential Medal of Freedom and Congressional Gold Medal. Wiesel died in 2016 of natural causes.

Using medieval techniques, the depiction of Wiesel was hand-carved by Cathedral stone carver Sean Callahan, who also carved the depictions of Mother Teresa, Rosa Parks, Jonathan Daniels and other sculptures throughout the Cathedral. The Wiesel model was sculpted by North Carolina artist Chas

Fagan, a member of the US Commission on Fine Arts whose other works include several carvings at the Cathedral, as well as the official White House portrait of First Lady Barbara Bush; statues of Ronald Reagan and Billy Graham at the US Capitol; and a statue of Pope John Paul II at the Saint John Paul II National Shrine in Washington.

About Washington Nat'l Cathedral:

Grounded in the reconciling love of Jesus Christ, Washington National Cathedral is a house of prayer for all people, conceived by our founders to serve as a great church for national purposes.

An evening event followed including remarks from members of the Wiesel family and Jon Meacham, canon historian of the Cathedral, Sarah Bloomfield, director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, The very Rev. Randolph Marshall Hollerith, dean of Washington National cathedral and Elisha Wiesel, son of Elie Wiesel and board member of the Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity.

There was also a panel conversation moderated by Meacham followed including:

- Dr. Mehnaz Afridi, director of the Holocaust, Genocide and Interfaith Education Center at Manhattan College
- Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State, member of the Cathedral Chapter (via video);
- Rabbi Irving "Yitz" Greenberg, former chairman of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council (via video)
- Rabbi David Saperstein, former US Ambassador for International Religious Freedom;
- Wai Wai Nu, witness to the genocide in Myanmar and founder of the Women's Peace Network.