

Lipstadt recounts case's emotional toll

PETER KOHN

AS Professor Deborah Lipstadt fought her successful legal battle against Holocaust denier David Irving, she wondered about the emotional impact of the long court hearing on Shoah survivors.

Delivering the 30th B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation Commission Gandel Oration in Melbourne last week, the acclaimed American historian explained her defence team's strategy in Irving's 1996 libel lawsuit against her for describing the Briton as a "Holocaust denier" in her book *Denying The Holocaust*.

Her senior lawyer, Anthony Julius, was determined to forensically retrace and expose Irving's falsifications of the facts, said Lipstadt, who also gave the Ervin Graf Memorial Oration in Sydney last week.

"We did not want to suggest to the court that we had to prove the Holocaust happened."

But while survivors were spared these indignities, particularly of being cross-examined by Irving, Lipstadt said she encountered distressed

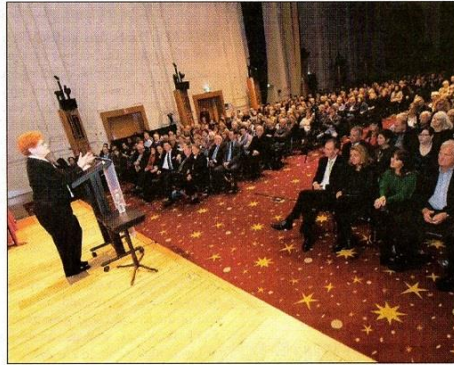
elderly spectators in the British courtroom.

At the end of the first day, Lipstadt was advised not to comment to the media scrum outside the courthouse, but a small woman nudged her way to the front, pulled up her sleeve and showed her tattooed number. "She said [to Lipstadt]: 'You are fighting for us. You are our witness.'"

One day a female survivor gave Lipstadt a list of family members with birth dates but no death dates, which the defendant kept by her in court.

During a gruesome discussion of the elevators at Auschwitz connecting the gas chambers to the crematoria, Lipstadt looked at the gallery and saw a distressed woman, presumably a survivor, and a younger woman with her arm around her.

"Maybe she had someone on that elevator. Maybe that was her family that was being spoken about ... What was to David Irving a great lark and a great campaign, an anti-Semitic campaign, and to me was a horrific thing and a legal battle, was to these people and to so many others such a personal attack, what one



Deborah Lipstadt delivering the Gandel Oration in Melbourne last week.

Photo: Peter Haskin

scholar called 'a double dying.'"

Lipstadt was approached by a British army veteran who was at the liberation of Nazi camps, condemning Irving and urging her to "get the bastard, madam, get the bastard".

Justice Charles Gray's judgment in 2000 declared Irving had "persistently and deliberately misrepresented and manipulated historical evidence", and that "he is an active Holocaust denier; that he is anti-Semitic and racist".

Lipstadt feels uncomfortable when thanked because in Jewish tradition, "chesed shel emet", preparing the dead for burial, is an obligation for which the dead cannot offer thanks. "When we take care of the dead, that's when we come closest to emulating God's kindness."

ADC chair Dr Dvir Abramovich told the sellout Melbourne audience at St Kilda Town Hall that "anti-Semitism is once again on the rise and by every measure remains disturbingly persistent".

Annette Gladwin, a long-time volunteer with ADC, was presented with the inaugural Caulfield District Victoria Volunteer Award by state MP for Caulfield David Southwick.

Watch highlights of Lipstadt's Gandel Oration Available on the iPad app and e-paper edition

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