

## In Memoriam: Eva Lassman

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Shalom! This is the way Eva Lassman always began and often ended her talks, indicating that Shalom means both “hello” and “peace.” This volume of the *Journal of Hate Studies* is dedicated to the memory of Eva Lassman, Holocaust survivor and honorary board member of the Institute for Hate Studies, who died February 9, 2011.

Eva was born in Lodz, Poland and was in her early twenties when Hitler conquered Poland. After being confined to the Warsaw Ghetto, she was transported to three different concentrations camps and lost her entire family. Following liberation, Eva married another survivor, Walter (Zev) Lassman. Although they wanted to stay in Poland, antisemitism remained high and they left to escape continuing prejudice and hatred. Eva and Walter resided in a displaced persons’ camp in Germany until 1949, at which time they immigrated to Spokane with two small children under the sponsorship of the Spokane Jewish community. Despite language barriers and knowing no one in Spokane, they made a wonderful life for their family, which included three brilliant sons, Richard, Joel, and Sylvan.

Eva loved Spokane and contributed much to our community. Although silent about her experiences as a Holocaust survivor until the 1980s, she was always a strong supporter of human rights and social justice. Eva’s message regarding the need to combat hate through education has been told to people of all ages, broadcast on radio, and recorded in documentaries. Eva compared hate to cancer, indicating that one could become consumed by hate. She was a strong voice against hate, relating her experiences to everyday events, such as bullying and violence in our schools and communities. Multiple articles have been written about Eva, and numerous students, from middle school to university doctoral students, have interviewed her.

Although Eva had every reason to hate her captors and the murderers of her family and friends, she decided to speak up about the perils of hate. She often said that we don’t have to be in love with everyone, but we do have to respect and stand up for each other. Eva was a strong advocate for peace and the moral legacy that we are our brothers’ keepers. Over the course of the past 30 years, Eva presented her testimony to numerous schools, to faith-based organizations, and at community events. She often ended her presentations with Pastor Martin Niemöller’s famous quote:

When the Nazis came for the communists,  
I remained silent; I was not a communist.  
When they locked up the social democrats,  
I remained silent; I was not a social democrat.  
When they came for the trade unionists,  
I did not speak out; I was not a trade unionist.  
When they came for the Jews,  
I remained silent; I was not a Jew.  
When they came for me,  
there was no one left to speak out.

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Niemöller was a German pastor who described the inactivity of German intellectuals following the Nazi rise to power and the destruction of chosen targets, group after group. This quote is a wake-up call for all of us to stand up for what is right.

The board members of the Institute learned profound lessons about love from Eva's heartfelt presentations about hate. As poignant as theory and conceptual frameworks are, there is nothing like lived experience to make meaning of the most unfathomable events. Eva brought the concept of resilience to life by sharing her testimony of surviving the worst possible forms of hate and demonstrating her ability to forgive and overcome obstacles in pursuit of a meaningful and fulfilling life. As an honorary member of the Institute, she brought a practical voice of reason to academia. She worked with us on many projects and always added a loving presence to our meetings. She was the first and last one to ask us whether the work of the Institute was making a difference on our campus in terms of combating hate.

Thankfully, Eva was honored many times over when she was alive. She received an Honorary Doctor of Laws from Gonzaga University, The Carl Maxey Racial Justice Award from the YWCA, a commendation from Whitworth University, and The Take Action Against Hate Award from The Institute for Hate Studies (Eva was the first to be honored at the annual dinner for this award), as well as community recognition for her work

Eva was a regional and national treasure. She has touched the lives of so many people in our community and brought personal meaning to The Institute for Hate Studies and Gonzaga University. She will be forever remembered for her kindness, acceptance, and forgiveness. Eva is a hero, and those who were lucky enough to know her are better people for having known her.

Shalom.