



September 28, 1984

Lisa Caputo
Deputy Assistant to the President
Press Secretary to the First Lady
First Lady's Press Office
Old Executive Office Building
Room 100
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Lisa:

Terry Schaefer suggested that I contact you about the possibility of a meeting between Mrs. Clinton and Margot Stern Strom to discuss the violence prevention initiative that Mrs. Clinton is about to launch. I understand that Terry called you about Margot's work as Executive Director of the Facing History and Ourselves Foundation.

Last Friday at a fund raiser for Sen. Kennedy, Margot and I heard Mrs. Clinton speak and I think that both would benefit from talking with each other about this critical issue. With Facing History's National Teacher Training Team, Margot has pioneered a violence prevention program to train teachers to help children develop critical thinking skills and learn about citizenship and individual choice. Margot has an extraordinary wealth of knowledge and hands-on experience with classroom teachers, educators, community leaders and most importantly from students whose voices she refers to as "our true moral philosophers." Annually more than 500,000 students, as well as thousands of teachers, participate in the Facing History program across the nation.

I understand that you all are in the beginning stages of this project but Terry encouraged me to see if Margot might speak with Mrs. Clinton early on during the planning phase. I know that I may be prejudiced but I think Margot's unique perspective, tremendous knowledge and down-to-earth style are a good match to Mrs. Clinton's open and thoughtful manner.

Vickie Kennedy has also spoken with Margot numerous times about the Facing History program. In addition, Sen. Kennedy's staff has been supportive of our work. Margot would be happy to come to Washington and would be flexible in order to accommodate Mrs. Clinton's schedule. Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Erica Stern
Director of External Relations



Facing History and Ourselves is a national educational and teacher training organization which provides a powerful, thought-provoking course of study for middle and high school students that both examines a watershed event of the twentieth century--the Holocaust--and directly links issues of individual choice and social justice to the day to day experience of young people, particularly those in urban areas. It is a dynamic, long-term educational approach that provides an ongoing system of services to help improve the overall quality of instruction to a school system, encouraging professional leadership and building a constituency that links the school and the community.

Facing History is doing something vitally important to the future of our country--bringing social justice and citizenship education into the schools, the only place where our nation's diversity is truly represented. Children of all social, economic, and racial backgrounds have the opportunity to explore the issues of peer pressure, scapegoating, and the responsibility of the individual in a democratic society.

The program is having a profound effect on education by preparing teachers to help students learn to think critically and to connect history to the moral choices they face in their own lives. Facing History illuminates themes of racism, antisemitism, and violence, and the difference each individual can make when a stand is taken for what is right.

Begun as a local grassroots organization 18 years ago, Facing History has a national impact on school reform. It is a model for partnership between government and the private sector, as it is now disseminated through the National Diffusion Network and funded by a combination of individual, foundation, and government grants. Founded by two Brookline middle school teachers, Facing History now reaches over 500,000 adolescents each year through the work of program staff in the national headquarters in Boston, regional offices in Chicago, Memphis and New York, and major initiatives in Baltimore, Los Angeles, and many other areas.

Facing History is an archetype of what can be done to jump-start education in urban areas by addressing the questions that kids face every day. Facing History provides timely classroom materials and the staff development opportunities necessary for teachers to address these crucial issues through a rigorous program of study. By working directly with teachers, Facing History's impact is multiplied each year that a trained teacher works with groups of students.

If you would like to receive further information or become involved with the work of Facing History, we encourage you to call or write our national headquarters in Brookline.



Focus On: Curriculum

Facing History

An acclaimed program helps teachers prepare students to bear the burden of the past.



Carol Resnek, a teacher at Chelsea (Mass.) High School, works on a clay model of a monument during a session at a summer institute for teachers offered by the foundation Facing History and Ourselves.

By Laura Miller

You would think that the man hurling himself from the witness stand and crumpling to the courtroom floor was having some kind of seizure. Knowing the circumstances—that the man had been personally selected by Adolf Eichmann to be sent to Auschwitz, and that in this television footage he stands witness at the Nazi war criminal's trial—you would think his reaction was triggered by some awful memory. By the sight of the renowned mass murderer. By the thought of millions killed.

But the 35 teachers who sit in the darkened room watching a videotape of "The Devil Is a Gentleman," a "60 Minutes" production that aired in 1983, learn that the convulsions were prompted by an even more terrifying realization.

"It's not a God!" the Holocaust survivor says, remembering his post-war confrontation with Eichmann. "It's not a Hitler! It's not Adolf Eichmann! It's me!"

The man collapses, the narrator explains, on realizing that "the Eichmann who stood before him at the trial was not the god-like army officer who had sent millions to their death. This Eichmann was an ordinary man, an unremarkable man. And if this Eichmann was so ordinary, so human," the narrator continues, then what Eichmann had done, "any man could be capable of doing."

When the lights come on, tensions run high. The teachers in the room are halfway into a weeklong summer institute that uses lessons from history to explore the consequences of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism.

One of the teachers half-jokes that the program is "relentless." A discussion ensues over whether some people are innately cruel. Or crazy.

But surely insanity couldn't explain the behavior of the hundreds of people who contributed to the Holocaust, says a staff member at the institute. "Do you buy into this," she asks the teachers, "about Eichmann being in all of us?"

Most teachers raise their hands. "All of you? 100 percent?" she presses.

A few teachers dissent.

And if you're the guy who forced Jews onto cattle cars to transport them to concentration camps, "are you an Eichmann?" someone asks.

"What about the guy sitting in the office, making the train schedules?" another prods.

"I think I could be a bystander," one teacher ventures. "But could I be an Eichmann? I don't know."

Facing History

The discussion comes at the end of a long day for participants in this teacher training institute, one of many run each year by the nonprofit foundation Facing History and Ourselves.

Through its staff-development initiatives and other outreach efforts, the nationally acclaimed effort reaches more than 10,000

Boston

teachers and, through them, more than half a million middle and high school students a year.

Its mission: to prepare teachers to help students think critically about human behavior, history, and the power of people to shape its course.

At one of this summer's institutes, teachers from all over the country traveled here to do just that. By the fourth day of the program—the day of the Eichmann discussion—they were heavily into the Holocaust.

Teachers began the day with a lesson on "The Stages of Mass Murder." Then came a break in the intensity to discuss different ways of incorporating literature and art into a study of social responsibility. Some of the teachers, put in the role of students, broke down into groups and created a moving series of skits based on a reading.

Later, Sonia Weitz, a Holocaust educator and survivor of five Nazi concentration camps, spoke to the teachers about her experiences and read from her poetry.

Just before the Eichmann video, teachers had broken down into new groups to read and discuss selections from the diaries of Nazi party members.

Small Steps to Catastrophe

But while the program focuses on the Holocaust as a means to get students to think about the moral choices they must confront in their own lives, Facing History is not out to "paralyze students"—or teachers—by shocking them with gruesome atrocities, says Marc Skvirsky, the program director. "In an eight-week course," he says, a teacher "might spend two to three days on the Holocaust."

Most of the time, he says, is spent examining the small steps that can lead to such a catastrophe: "How people become bystanders, how people become perpetrators, how neighbors turn against neighbors."

The training institutes take teachers through a whirlwind Facing History course that might start with discussions of identity, stereotyping, and conformity, and wind down with lessons on caring and taking a stand in one's own community.

Early lectures at this particular workshop, for example, covered journal writing, the power of propaganda, the religious roots of intolerance, "Racial Identity Development," and the "Forgotten History of the American Eugenics Movement." On the last evening, teachers relaxed, watching slides of famous monuments, constructing their own out of clay, and talking about what goes into memorializing a person or an event.

Facing History held 13 such institutes this summer and two during the school year, in addition to many shorter, introductory workshops and special events geared toward students and the community outside the classroom.

Founded by two Brookline, Mass., middle school teachers 17 years ago, Facing History now has regional offices in Chicago,

Memphis, and New York, and major initiatives in Baltimore and Los Angeles. Its outreach efforts span the country and have even traveled as far as Germany, Switzerland, Canada, and Britain. It currently has a \$3 million annual operating budget.

It has also linked up with such school-reform initiatives as the U.S. Education Department's National Diffusion Network, the Violence Prevention Network, the New American Schools Development Corporation, and the National Urban Alliance.

Scaling Up

What distinguishes Facing History from many other staff-development efforts is the continuing support teachers receive after the seminars end. During the year, a Facing History staff member regularly consults with teachers, helping them develop and sustain a program that's appropriate for adolescents. "There's a lot of hand-holding," Skvirsky says.

In fact, if three days go by and Carol Resnek hasn't spoken to her Facing History staff contact, "we're calling each other," the Chelsea (Mass.) High School teacher says.

Resnek, who teaches community-service learning in the ethnically diverse Boston suburb, uses Facing History materials for about one-third of her instructional time.

"Facing History helped me build community in my classroom," says Resnek, who relied heavily last year on *Choosing to Participate*, a book that continues the last chapter of the *Facing History and Ourselves Resource Book*. The class also watched videos from the organization's extensive library, went to see "Schindler's List," and, as preparation for a field trip to listen to Holocaust survivor Weitz, read her book of poetry and testimony, *I Promised I Would Tell*.

Several days after the class visited Weitz, the teacher says, "Some kids have told me that they're still thinking about her, and that they're getting along a lot better with their brothers and sisters. And you know, that kind of thing comes and goes, but I think that someday, somewhere, when they need it most, it will come back to them."

While some of the teachers here, like Resnek, have been using Facing History in their classrooms, others are just being introduced to the program's many possibilities.

Michael Sullivan, a psychology

teacher from Hudson High School outside Worcester, Mass., has come to the seminar with two of his colleagues who plan to integrate Facing History into a new, required course in civics.

Why the Holocaust?

Sullivan anticipates that Facing History will be easily applied at Hudson High, which has a large Portuguese-American population.

A monument to the dead

During the summer institute, a program staff member showed slides of some student-made monuments to the Holocaust and read the students' descriptions of their works. Below is one 8th grader's description.

"My monument is to the dead. I spent this entire unit trying to put myself in the situations of different people. A bystander, a Jew, a Nazi. Now, I decided to make a monument to the group of people that no one can argue about. The group that is easy to understand. The dead. No matter what you say, the result of the Holocaust is the dead. So I wanted to make a monument to something no one can argue with. I want people to think of all the dead and be just a little scared. I tried to make my monument scary. It's also messy. That's the way everyone died, in a mess. I made a pile with figures on it to say that they were part of the earth, and they were not treated any better. The messiness of my monument and the abstractions are my main messages. I don't want this monument to be in a field, or some place where it's alone. I want it right in the center of downtown Boston ... on the steps of the State House. So that it's in the way. So people will notice it. I want people to be annoyed by my monument. I want them to think it's so messy that people will try to fix it. Which is what everyone should have done in the Holocaust."

But he also expects that not all teachers and parents will understand the program's value.

"One of the arguments I've heard from some of the teachers is, 'Why the Holocaust? Why not something closer to home?'" says Sullivan.

Twice in 1987 and again in 1988, U.S. Education Department officials asked that same question, and denied funding to Facing History and Ourselves under the National Diffusion Network, a program that makes exemplary instructional programs on a variety of subjects available to school districts.

One member of a panel chosen to review the program in 1987 complained that Facing History failed to represent the views of Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan. Critics of the panel then charged

that political conservatives had formed the panel to deny funding to programs they opposed. After another scuffle over funding, in 1989 Facing History finally received a grant of \$59,367 a year—renewable for four years—to support its dissemination efforts.

Since that time, a number of states, namely California, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and, most recently, New York, have mandated that schools teach about the Holocaust. But most of those states don't give any guidance on how to treat such a topic, and it's important to do so responsibly, program officials say.

Also, "There's a difference between teaching the Holocaust in a way that simply memorializes it and in a way that empowers students to make a difference in their own lives," says Ted Scott, the regional director of Facing History.

Participants agree that the Holocaust is an ideal case study, particularly for schools serving disadvantaged populations.

"People tend to think black people are not interested in this, but there's a commonality to suffering," says Renee Gordon, a coordinator of the arts and humanities at John Bartram High School in Philadelphia. "You would have thought that Germany in 1928 was America in 1994—not just for blacks but for all minorities. So the Holocaust is a mirror."

It sounds absurd, for example, that in 1938, President Franklin Roosevelt was urging other nations to open their doors to Jewish immigrants, while at the same time closing U.S. doors. But it also sounds a whole lot like U.S. policy toward Haiti today, the teachers point out.

It seems unfathomable, moreover, that the world could stand by and allow the Holocaust

to happen. "But where was the public outcry about Rwanda?" one teacher asks.

And what about the genocide in Bosnia today, others question, and the violence in our own communities?

"Facing History tries to help kids understand that in every situation they have choices," says Jennifer Clarke, a program associate. "Sometimes they're not good choices, and each individual choice has a lot of possible consequences. But for a lot of kids, that in itself is empowerment."

Margot Stern Strom, the executive director and one of Facing History's founders, cites another reason for the program's continued success.

"It's compelling. It's relevant. It's timely," she says. "And kids remember it."

London Times-Education Supplement 9/16/94

Moving pictures

In the United States, the film 'Schindler's List' has forced people to reappraise their approach to history and themselves. John Davies reports on its introduction to the classroom

It won Oscars. It moved cinema audiences. It was the subject of thousands of newspaper columns, letters, phone-ins and other discussion forums. There is no doubt that in the United States, *Schindler's List* helped raise public consciousness on the subject of Nazi Germany's treatment of the Jews.

That raised consciousness is now being translated into classrooms. This summer, hundreds of high school teachers across the States attended workshops and summer institutes, in which they learned how to make use of Steven Spielberg's film as a resource for getting pupils to think about moral issues.

The organisation that has been entrusted with the task – by Spielberg himself – is a Boston-based, non-profit group called Facing History and Ourselves (FHIO), but often just referred to as Facing History.

Launched in 1976, Facing History is, in the words of the introduction to its latest resource book, "devoted to teaching about the dangers of indifference and the values of civility, by helping schools confront the complexities of history in ways that promote critical and creative thinking".

Thus, although the background to the Holocaust has been an essential element of the Facing History programme, there is a broader aim: "whatever we can do to get the kids to walk in one another's shoes" is how Margot Stern Strom, Facing History's co-founder and now executive director, puts it.

Typically, a class of American teenagers taking a Facing History unit might learn about the genocide not only of Jews in Hitler's Germany but also of Armenians in Turkey earlier in the century, discuss problems of tolerance, racism and equality in today's society, examine Nazi and other wartime propaganda techniques, and read stories set in the past and in imaginary future societies.

They might be visited by one or more of FHIO's speakers, who range from Holocaust survivors such as Rena Finder (who worked in Oskar Schindler's factory when she was 14) to *Baywatch* actor and activist Gregory Alan-Williams. (A black American, Alan-Williams became one of the heroes of the 1992 Los Angeles riots when he rescued a Japanese American from a mob attack. He recently published an autobiography, *A Gathering of Heroes*, that reflected on his experience as a victim of racism and a propagandist for social justice.)

"It's facing history and ourselves – a balance of the two," emphasises Strom. "It's supposed to introduce kids first to questions of identity – who am I, where do I get my ideas from? To thinking about their own thinking, and about others. There are lessons about name-calling, about labelling, about assimilation... Ultimately they should be able to make wise judgements."

As well as workshops and teacher-training seminars, Facing History's resources include a lending library of relevant videos and films, books, recordings, posters and articles. The organisation, which now has offices in New York, Chicago, Memphis, and (shortly) Los Angeles as well as its main headquarters in the Boston



Screen saver: 'Schindler's List' is being used by the Facing History group to warn against prejudice by confronting examples of past intolerance. Ben Kingsley as Jewish accountant Itzhak Stern

suburb of Brookline, also runs conferences, adult education programmes, and community events.

According to Strom, who, 20 years ago was a history and English teacher in Brookline, Facing History began after she had attended a workshop on the Holocaust – about which, she says, her education had told her next to nothing. "As I reflected on the issues the workshop speakers raised, I began to feel a sense of disquiet about my own education and that of my students," she recalls. Her childhood was spent in a still-segregated Tennessee, where "you could live next to a zoo that let black people in only on Thursday but still get an A in civics by memorising the bill of rights". This led her to the realisation that her schooling had left out a lot of history and "the moral dimensions of history".

However, Facing History soon recognised that simply "memorialising" the Holocaust "wasn't enough. "Often the first cut at the kind of history-telling is like feminism in its early stages – it's documenting the pain, and not always looking at opportunities for prevention," says Strom. "But our take from the beginning was social justice education."

She emphasises that as a teacher developing Facing History materials, in the early days she was taught by her pupils as much as they were by her. "They kept journals, which I still have, they previewed films, their parents came into the classroom. The kids felt it was important material, and the teachers didn't always have the right answers."

Now that Facing History has become more established, it is an example of what the *Boston Globe* has described as "a new American export: teaching tolerance". The organisation has been invited to seminars and workshops for teachers in Germany, Switzerland and Hungary, among other European countries, and has links with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam as part of a "rolling interchange among like-minded people"; as Strom puts it.

What about Britain? As long ago as 1986 the University of East Anglia hosted a conference entitled "Facing History and Ourselves: The Holocaust and Human Behaviour", although FHIO's links with this country seem not to be very strong now. "But we've got to keep our focus here in the USA," says Strom, "because there's so much work to be done. We've so much to learn".

"We've been collecting lesson plans and journals and letters that kids have written to Spielberg that are really remarkable," she enthuses. "Remarkable, because no one can believe that kids are full of such moral passion."

She recalls Spielberg thinking that the film "wasn't going to be popular – and he wanted it to have life. He was like the school teachers who get involved in this history for the first time – all of a sudden you discover the morality and it starts affecting your own behaviour. You want your children to know about it."

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Fighting hate's hidden curriculum

Of course history doesn't repeat itself exactly, but there is a warning bell ringing in our community. It echoes lyrics of the musical from South Pacific: You've got to be taught to hate and fear. You've got to be taught from year to year. It's got to be drummed into your sweet little ear. You've got to be carefully taught, you've got to be carefully taught.

And someone is teaching our kids to hate. Daily we witness the success of a "hidden curriculum" learned on the school playground, in the cafeteria and in the parks and streets of our towns and cities. It is a curriculum often more powerful and better mastered than the daily lessons prepared by the teacher.

In classrooms across this country students share a universal knowledge of words and images of the "other." When students are asked to describe what they think they know about "others," their answers often reveal virulent stereotypes: Asians are X..." and "Blacks are X..." and "Jews are X..." Their knowledge fills pages, and their recall is perfect. They have been carefully taught myths and misinformation. Is it a surprise that neighbor is turning against neighbor?



JOHN OVERMYER ILLUSTRATION

When the chasm between the curriculum of the classroom and the daily lives of our students is so wide, students exercise their options. They stop trusting their teachers; the curriculum seems irrelevant. Some continue to play the "game of education," attending class and telling teachers what they want to hear. Others become cynical, indifferent and apathetic. Still others, alienated and angry, drop out. Public spaces and institutions, streets and schools give little refuge as fear grows until finally the practice of communal trust and the activity of civic life are memories. Increasingly, the nation's youth are expressing rage through violence.

We must provide our children with a reason to go to school - a curriculum that matters. We need to re-energize, re-support and re-tool our teachers to reach and teach the students who need the lessons of tolerance first before they can practice the science, math and history necessary to work and live in this complex world.

The remedies for education share characteristics with successful interventions in health care and day care: they must be quality programs, proven to be effective; they must be timely; they must invest in people; they must be flexible. The activity is labor intensive, and the results take time.

Boston Sunday Globe

DECEMBER 27, 1992

No one can legislate morality and good citizenship or family values and healthy kids.

"The nonprofits spend far less for results than governments spend for failures," wrote Peter Drucker, the internationally acclaimed author and professor of social sciences at Claremont College. "What is needed, therefore, is a public policy that establishes the nonprofits as the country's first line of attack on its social problems."

One such nonprofit in education is Facing History and Ourselves. The Boston-based national teacher training organization, cited by the US Department of Education as exemplary, was funded in the 1970s under a special federal program aimed at identifying and developing programs worthy of dissemination across the country. Facing History works because it delivers service to teachers. Its programs are rigorous, relevant and flexible.

In classrooms in Boston and across the country there are Facing History teachers combatting the hidden curriculum by teaching about social justice and responsible democratic citizenship. With the guidance of Facing History staff and resource speakers, teachers create a Facing History course using the historical case study of the failure of Weimar Germany and the Holocaust of Jews, as well as events from American history that illuminate the themes of peer pressures, obedience and discrimination. Facing

History staff and resource speakers show educators how to use history, literature, art, math and science to bring issues such as individual choice, tolerance, dogma, evil and altruism into the classroom.

Recently, a Facing History teacher reflected on his students' responses to the LA riots. He said, "My students ... understood the process of scapegoating. We developed an equation in the classes: Dehumanization + Threat = Violence. They could understand who was being threatened, both in the dominant groups and in the out groups. They could see how some people were both victims and perpetrators."

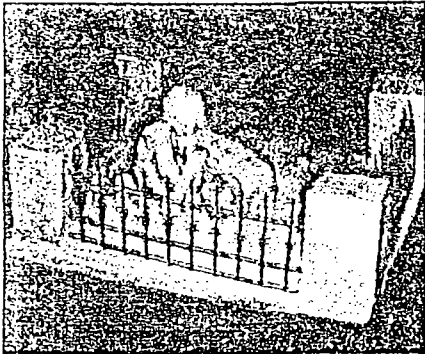
After the Rodney King beating, the consequences of hate were felt throughout Los Angeles. The city closed many schools in order to ensure the safety of the young. It is in these very schools, however, that we must welcome our students into a safe haven and prevent such outbursts of hate in the future.

Someone is teaching our kids to hate. But we can teach them how to avoid violence, practice empathy and see the world through the lens of the other. We can teach them to understand how hate works.

Margot Stern Strom is executive director of Facing History and Ourselves.

Teaching children a way of life without hate

By Joseph P. Kahn
GLOBE STAFF



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JANET KNOTT

"Fenced Soldier," by a student at the Runkle School in Brookline, is part of an exhibit at the Mall at Chestnut Hill.

Ourselves, a nationally recognized educational program based in Brookline; but because an opportunity was lost for a more important process to happen.

And what was important at that moment, Strom argues, was for schoolchildren to examine the tragedy unfolding around them, from the battlegrounds of their immediate neighborhoods to American society in general. The opportunity to face history, in other words, as it was literally being written before their eyes: in smoke and tears, busted glass and broken promises.

STROM, Page 87



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JANET KNOTT

Margot Stern Strom, executive director of Facing History And Ourselves, based in Brookline.

Facing History aims to teach children a way of life without hate

■ STROM

Continued from Page 85

"School is often more of a safe haven for kids than their neighborhoods are," notes Strom during a recent (and rare) break in her busy schedule. "Maybe shutting down schools that first day was the only reasonable option. I don't know."

She lowers her voice, letting slip a trace of her native Tennessee drawl. "Still," she says, "if I lived out there I would at least have wanted to be part of the decision process."

Strom is, if nothing else, a crusader with credentials. And perspective.

Fifteen years ago, the former Runkle School social studies teacher co-founded an organization dedicated to teaching teachers and students new ways of thinking about societal evils like racism and anti-Semitism. Not *what* to think about them, says Strom, since moral evolution is perforce a personal journey. But a better way of understanding how a horror like the Holocaust can occur with the assistance, active or passive, of otherwise well-meaning citizens: doctors, lawyers, poets, policemen.

The approach was altogether novel for a generation conditioned to think of Nazi atrocities as ancient history.

By studying the raw material of prejudice — Ku Klux Klan recruiting films and pro-Hitler propaganda, for example — students learn about the root causes of genocide, not simply the results. By examining the lives of unsung heroes, they better appreciate how individuals can make a positive difference for society as a whole.

And that's what Facing History is really all about, Strom says. A dose of preventive medicine for a nation that goes into shock whenever the virus of hatred activates itself, causing a full-blown attack on the body politic.

"My husband is an immunologist, so I'm familiar with the language," Strom points out. "We spend millions to develop a drug to treat the symptoms of a disease. We wait for something acute to happen, and then we respond. Doesn't it make sense to try to avoid the disease in the first place? I think so."

Lt. William Johnston, commander of the Boston Police Department's Community Disorders Unit, concurs. Outraged by the Rodney King verdict himself, Johnston believes that kids need to learn about the param-



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / JANET KWOT

Part of the exhibit coordinated by Facing History And Ourselves at the Mall at Chestnut Hill.

eters of prejudice long before it becomes an ingrained part of their adult lives.

"The one thing haters have in common is cowardice," says Johnston, bluntly, "whether they hide behind a sheet, a dark alley, a policeman's badge or a politician's office. Facing History gives the potential hater a reason not to hate."

Johnston was introduced to the program three years ago. Since then, he has gone into dozens of schools to preach the message of preventive medicine. Last week in LA, he laments, the message was ignored. With tragic results.

"Any community that believes they're immune from that kind of trouble is insane," Johnston says. "The lesson we should all learn is that when people feel they can't turn to the courts or the cops, they take to the streets."

Given last week's painful civics lesson, this week's 15th anniversary celebration for Facing History could hardly arrive at a more opportune moment. It will be marked by several events, including a special exhibit at the Mall at Chestnut Hill and an all-day Human Rights and Justice Conference today at Northeastern University.

Ensclosed in the upper floors of a Brookline school building scheduled for massive renovation, Facing History is, ironically, also losing its headquarters at the end of this month. Having expanded from a two-person operation into a multi-service, nonprofit foundation with a \$1.5 million annual operating budget, FHAO has opened three regional offices, yet continues to search for an

alternative home base here.

Meanwhile, an estimated 500,000 students have already been exposed to the course, including students at the Fenway Middle College High School, a Boston public school in Charlestown.

"Facing History is really a grounding place, a way of thinking about our whole curriculum," says Linda Nathan, the school's assistant director, who has been using the program for the past nine years. "It's a lesson in depth versus breadth. And as kids discover, there is a lot of power in knowing something well."

"The significance lies in the title," says Rev. Robert Bullock of Sharon, an FHAO board member. "The idea of facing history by using the Holocaust as an example of the most graphic evil imaginable, to teach young minds about the limits and excesses of human behavior."

"One of the great moral centers of Facing History," Bullock adds, "is not to take evil lightly but to face it without illusions. It's not about blaming or posturing. It's about understanding and learning."

Strom's organization knows something about blaming and posturing in political circles. In the mid-1980s, it came under attack from right-wingers critical of its alleged ideological bent. Despite high marks from the Department of Education's Recognition Division, federal funding that was earmarked to help FHAO expand into sponsor-risky regions disappeared abruptly in 1986. One key factor in the decision: A DOE reviewer had criticized Facing History for failing to include Nazi

and Klan points of view.

Although a high-ranking DOE official later said he was "embarrassed" by the comments, Facing History was suddenly faced with its own firestorm of controversy. A second DOE review branded the program as "leftist" and "offensive to fundamentalists," while archconservative Phyllis Schlafly complained that the curriculum had "adverse, negative and offensive psychological effects" on students.

Strom was summoned to Congressional hearings in 1988, where she responded to her critics with a characteristic mixture of passion, aplomb and wit.

"They were nervous because in a course like this, dogma gets exposed," she explains, noting that FHAO continues to receive around \$60,000 annually in federal aid. "However, I never viewed anyone as a personal enemy. I even enjoyed debating Phyllis Schlafly. In fact, I think Phyllis is the best advocate for the First Amendment I've ever known."

Strom laughs instinctively at the thought of praising Schlafly for any reason. In more somber tones she

adds, "To call Phyllis evil is to dismiss her needlessly. She wants what we all want. A good life for her family and the freedom to speak her mind."

Democratic state chairman Steven Grossman, another FHAO booster and board member, says that attitude represents the quintessential Margot Stern Strom: tough but open-minded; more generous with her detractors than they perhaps deserve; and a teacher first and foremost, meaning (a) a good learner, (b) a good listener and (c) a consensus builder.

"When potential donors find out Margot went head-to-head with Phyllis," Grossman says, "it only enhances her reputation. Margot has also never lost her humility. She can see a challenge through with a sense of humor and intensity of commitment that would have brought most people to their knees."

Plus, Grossman adds, Strom is extremely adept at sharing credit with those around her, especially her staff.

So much so, in fact, that focusing a conversation on Strom's personal life is largely an exercise in futility.

There is one story she tells, however, which says much about her mission.

In 1963, Strom returned to her hometown of Memphis to visit her parents, who owned and operated a furniture store in a racially mixed neighborhood. The day she and her sister arrived was also the day Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, touching off a spate of LA-type rioting.

The family furniture store was broken into and trashed. Tanks rumbled down the streets outside her home. Yet the worst moment happened when the two sisters asked an old friend and trusted neighbor to come over and sit with them.

The man turned up carrying a shotgun, Strom recalls, and asked for a bourbon-and-branch-water. Sipping his drink, he said, "As soon as that nigger is out of town" — meaning the slain civil rights leader — "we'll be OK."

"We immediately asked him to leave," says Strom. "We were both in shock. I'll never forget that moment."

In such moments, it seems, are great ideas born.