

Long-Range Effects of the March of the Living on Participants

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Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	3
<u>Executive Summary</u>	5
<u>Results</u>	8
Why They Went	8
Jewish Organizational Membership	8
Relationship to Israel	9
Marriage and Family Life	9
Charitable Giving	12
Tolerance & Advocacy for Others	12
Holocaust Deniers & Anti-Semitism	14
Jewish Identity	14
Career Choices	15
Long Range Effects of the Program	18

Introduction

The March of the Living sponsored its first trip in 1988. Its basic format is to have students visit the concentration camp sites in Europe and then complete their trip in Israel. In 1993, the first in-depth study of the March's long term impact on participants was undertaken. A total of 300 interviews were conducted with students who went in 1988, 1990, and 1992.

The results were unambiguous. The March made a profound impression on participants and its impact was long-lasting. Respondents reported a heightened sense of Jewish identity, both religious and cultural. Among other things, they indicated an increased desire to live in Israel, to participate in Jewish organizations, as well as great concern about the loss of identity that would, in all likelihood, accompany interfaith marriage.

Since that study, much has happened in the Jewish community. The rate of intermarriage has climbed to between 50%-60%, depending on how one interprets the research. Anti-Semitism has decreased in the United States, but increased worldwide. Trips to Israel by American Jews are down and only about 20% of American Jews today have ever visited Israel, a drop of about 10% in the last decade. In addition, the largest target group of the March Program, college bound Jewish students, attends school in an atmosphere far more hostile to Israel and often to Jews as a group than was the case on college campuses a decade ago.

The proportion of Orthodox Jews compared to the larger Jewish community has increased a bit, to about 8%-10% of the total. Identifying Reform and Conservative Jews have, on the whole, become somewhat more traditional, but an even larger group has ceased to identify in any meaningful way as Jews. Notwithstanding these developments, researchers report a continuing desire to connect spiritually with something meaningful.

Worldwide developments have also impacted on the North American Jewish community in many ways, most of them unexplored to date. The hopes engendered by the ill-fated Oslo Accords have largely dissipated. Since 1993, an Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzchak Rabin, has been assassinated; efforts were made to reinvigorate the peace process, culminating in the failed meetings at Camp David and at Taba in 2000 and 2001. The Palestinians launched an Intifada, which has, to date, claimed several thousand lives. And then there was 9/11 and the Iraqi War, both events which have deeply concerned and divided the Jewish community. Add to that the emergence of a Republican President, George W. Bush, who strongly supports Israel and it becomes abundantly clear that much has changed indeed.

In light of these developments it seemed worthwhile to examine the effects of the March of the Living on participants who had lived through all of these events. Did the March take on added significance when refracted through the prism of the larger environment? In addition, there was now an opportunity to assess the March's long-term significance, not over 2-6 years, but over 12 years. At the time of the first study, the March was shown to have long-lasting effects on participants despite its brief duration, largely because of the intensity and quality of the experience. How true is this today, now that many of those who went are fully engaged in careers?

A random sample of 300 past participants was interviewed by telephone in the spring of 2004 by trained interviewers. The refusal rate was less than 5%. Results are rounded off to the nearest percentage point. Close to one-third of the respondents were from Canada, mostly the Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa areas, the remainder from across the U.S. Each 49 item interview lasted approximately 20-25 minutes and the queries were of both a statistical and in-depth nature. An equal number of respondents came from the cohorts that went on the March in 1992, 1999, and 2003. Interviewees came from Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and unaffiliated backgrounds and possessed varying degrees of Jewish education. Naturally, March participants are a somewhat select group inasmuch as it can be

argued that the decision to go indicates a perhaps greater than average commitment to things Jewish. For this reason, the study focused primarily on the increase in belief, identification, and behavior as a result of participating in the program.

The March of the Living organization played no role in the gathering and analysis of the data, all of which was carried out independently by the researcher, the interviewing team, and those who performed the statistical analysis of the results. Its only function was to make available their master lists for data gathering purposes. They understood, in advance, that the results would be made public, regardless as to whether they cast the organization in a favorable or unfavorable light. Participants were told that the study was being conducted by Professor William Helmreich, a sociologist at CUNY Graduate Center.

Executive Summary

Since the last study of the March's long range impact much has happened and a new study is therefore needed. Inter-marriage is up, as is assimilation, anti-Semitism has increased world-wide, visits to Israel by Jews are down, college students face more anti-Semitism on campuses, the Oslo Accords have collapsed, bringing in their wake an Intifada; 9-11 has occurred and we are at war in Iraq.

A total of 300 past March participants from across North America were selected at random and interviewed in-depth in the spring of 2004 about their experiences. They consisted of individuals who went during three distinct time phases - 2003, 1999, and 1992. The refusal rate was less than 5%. Interviewees came from Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and unaffiliated backgrounds and possessed varying degrees of Jewish education. The study focused, not on absolute indices of Jewish identification, but on the specific increase in such identification as a direct result of going on the March.

Friends and parents played major roles in the decision to participate in the program. Almost 80%

belonged to one or another Jewish organization, with one quarter crediting the March with the decision to join. About 45% visited Israel after the March. Of those who did, 19% did so twice and 32% visited three or more times. A majority, 52%, said they would consider making Aliyah and 45% indicated that the March had influenced their thinking on this issue. The largest number of potential olim came from the 2003 cohort, with 69% stating that they would consider moving to Israel.

The overwhelming majority, 94%, asserted that it was important that their spouse be Jewish. And if the spouse was not Jewish, then 64% would insist that he or she converts to Judaism. About 94% intend to provide their children with a Jewish education. 76% of those queried say they wish to live in a Jewish community once they have settled down and begin raising a family. Almost half say the March positively influenced their views on these matters.

There is a strong relationship between the March and charitable giving. An overwhelming majority, 85%, report that the March made them more likely to donate to Jewish causes and 66% say they have already done so. These results suggest that the program reaps rich dividends for other Jewish organizations as well.

Almost two-thirds of those responding told interviewers that the March had made them more tolerant towards other groups. A small minority claimed that the March had made them less tolerant by making them angry at how Jews had been treated by the world in their hour of need. About 32% acknowledged involvement in social causes on behalf of the poor, the homeless, women, minority groups, etc. with an equal number attributing such activity to the March experience. Interestingly, by a 2 to 1 margin, participants were involved in general, as opposed to Jewish, causes. This may not please Jewish organizations, but it does speak to the universal lessons drawn by participants.

Of those who went on the trip, 95% stated that it had heightened their awareness of the need to become involved when confronted by anti-Semitism. And in 35% of the cases, students reported having become more of “a campus activist” in this area. A full 93% noted that the March had increased their Jewish identity and 29% reported an increase in Jewish observances. The March was cited as a contributing factor by 81% of those responding.

Among those who had fully entered professional life, almost 25% reported that the March affected their career choice, a remarkable figure for a program that, however intense it is, lasts but two weeks. This applied to both Jewishly oriented careers and non-Jewish ones.

About 84% of March participants believed that the March had impacted on their “thinking as a Jew” and 58% claimed it had considerably influenced their “behavior as a Jew.” More people, 93%, ranked the visits to the camps as very important than they did any other aspect of the trip. This was followed by the Israel segment of the trip (57%), the March itself (47%) and last, the visits to towns, museums, and other sites (31%).

It is fair to conclude, from these results, that the March of the Living is an extremely successful program. It greatly enhances Jewish identity, commitment, and behavior. For researchers and program planners, the results definitively prove that the combination of experiences that participants go through and the images they evoke have a deep and lasting impact on them. And they tell us that what matters most is not a program’s length, but its content and quality.

Results

Why They Went

Overall, almost one third of those who went on the March were influenced in their decision by their friends. This means that the March has already established a good reputation and can count on past participants to be good will ambassadors for the program.

Roughly the same percentage, one-third, reported that they went, in part, because their parents wanted them to go. Thus, we see that parents play a significant role in the decision to go on the trip.

Almost all participants were familiar with the general subject, and had begun learning about it from about the time they entered high school. They elected to participate because they felt the experience would enhance their knowledge to an even greater degree.

Jewish Organizational Membership

Almost 80% of those responding were connected to one or another Jewish group. A little over a third of March participants belonged to synagogues, with 16% reporting membership in Jewish youth groups, such as B'nai Brith Youth Organization, Hillel, Young Judea, etc. and 18% claiming member status in national groups, like the American Jewish Committee and Federation. As might be expected, older participants were more apt to belong to the national organizations. Also, 9% stated that they were formally affiliated with local Jewish groups. The seemingly low synagogue membership is due to the younger age of March participants. In many cases, they felt no need to join a temple because their family already belonged to one.

Of greater interest, in terms of the March's influence, 26% asserted that their decision to join Jewish organizations was affected by their experiences in the program. Moreover, 27% claimed that the March

had made them more active in their synagogue.

Relationship to Israel

Overall, those who went on the March strengthened their relationship with the State of Israel. About 45% visited Israel after going on the March. Of those who did, 19% did so twice, and a remarkably high 32% visited three or more times. Coincidence? Definitely not, as almost half told interviewers that the March had played a significant role in that decision.

Respondents pursued various activities while in Israel. Some worked on programs, others studied, and most included touring on their itinerary. Most important, a majority, 52%, said they would consider making Aliyah, and 45% claimed that the March had influenced their thinking about this issue. The largest number of potential olim came from the 2003 cohort, with 69% stating that they would consider immigrating to Israel.

Marriage and Family Life

Most of this population is single, about 4 out of 5 past participants. When asked whether it mattered to them that their spouse be Jewish, the overwhelming response, 94%, was yes, it did. And if the spouse was not Jewish, 64% would insist that he or she convert to Judaism. About 94% of those answering intend to provide their children with a Jewish education, further evidence of an extraordinarily high commitment to Jewish life. Further probing, however, revealed that the process and decisions made could sometimes be quite complex:

“My husband converted, but I didn’t insist. I always said: ‘This needs to be your decision.’ He was already interested in Judaism, so it wasn’t a stretch. We talked a lot about how he shouldn’t do it for me. I would not insist that he convert, but we probably wouldn’t have ended up getting married. We would have broken up at some point. It was an issue from the very beginning for me.” ***A 1992 March participant from Massachusetts***

Significantly, 49% credit the March with having played a major role in how they viewed these issues. The trip's emphasis on Jewish history proved instructive, as noted by a 2002 participant from Plantation, Florida: "I learned on the program that it's important to carry on the Jewish tradition." Others added that the trip was useful as a preventive measure. A 17 year old from Quebec, Canada, observed: "It's very important to carry on the tradition and educate my children, so that something like the Holocaust never happens again."

It is clear from many of the responses that the March didn't simply reinforce their views on the subject -it changed them:

"The trip gave me more of a sense of identity. Before, I was not connected with my Jewish identity. Now Judaism is more important to me and now I think more about the future of the Jewish people."

A 17 year old 2002 participant from Montreal, Canada

Of even greater interest is whether or not participants felt that the trip impacted on their thinking in this area 12 years later, not simply in the year following the journey to Europe and Israel. The responses of those who went in 1992, reveal that for most, the effects were deep and lasting:

"I can't really speak for the American Jewish community—we're more assimilated. As for my own family, I want to make sure they have a strong Jewish upbringing, learn Jewish values and morals, and continue to be Jewish. The March of the Living definitely scared me into seeing what the future has in store for the Jewish people."

A 29 year old woman from South Euclid, Ohio

"What really affected me was ... I was astonished that everybody knew how these people had died, but how little people cared about these peoples' actual lives. One thousand teenagers who could name concentration camps, but could they name four Yiddish writers? I learned Yiddish at 22, married someone who speaks Yiddish. I have a

problem with the way Americans are taught about the Holocaust—there is little interest in European Jewish life, only about European Jewish death. I was very disturbed by that. It's the way we think about history, not just the March." ***A 27 year old writer from New York City***

This respondent is implicitly critical of the March's overriding focus on the Holocaust, but at the same time, she appreciates that this emphasis fostered an interest in Eastern European Jewish life and culture. As a result, she has chosen a particular approach that defines an enhanced sense of Jewish identity.

"I think about who I wanted to be married to in high school and I remember writing things in my journal. The March made me realize what type of family I wanted to have and what type of person I wanted to meet. It was such an emotional trip. The biggest impact on me was seeing the amount of Jewishness that was destroyed. How could you not want to build that back up?"

The interviews revealed that for many, the ethnic identity of their future spouse had been something they thought about, but not a central issue. Now it became one. Because the March heightened their sense of Jewish identity, marrying someone with that same attachment became more of a priority.

Jewish family life is also correlated with residence. Living in a community with a sizeable Jewish population translates into friends, schools, synagogues, and, therefore, higher levels of Jewish identification. 76% of those queried expressed the desire to live in a Jewish community once they went out on their own.

Charitable Giving

The study has definitely established a high causal relationship between going on the March and giving to Jewish causes. When asked if the March had made them more likely to donate money to Jewish causes, an overwhelming majority, 85%, said yes. And this was not hypothetical. Approximately 66% of those queried reported that they had, in fact, contributed to Jewish causes already. This is a strong indication that the program reaps rich dividends for other Jewish organizations as well. There were no statistically significant differences between the various denominations or between those who had gone on the March very recently or long ago, with one obvious exception. The older the person, the greater the likelihood that they had already given money.

Tolerance and Advocacy for Others

One might wonder whether such an ethnocentric experience might make those who go less tolerant towards others, sort of a “You can’t trust anyone else.” or “Everyone hates the Jews.” This did not appear to be the case. There was a clear spin-off effect on March participants with respect to attitudes towards others. 64% of those responding, almost two-thirds, reported that the trip made them more tolerant towards other groups. The ability to generalize among those queried was clear:

“The March has made me less judgmental of other people, not as quick to dislike somebody just because they are different.” ***A 22 year old participant from Hamilton, Ontario***

“It made me look at people differently. I don’t want to be a person that judges others the way we were judged in Europe 70 years ago.” ***A 23 year old participant from Westmount, Quebec***

“It has made me more tolerant of others because I feel that such a lack of tolerance is what caused the Holocaust to become what it did.” ***A 24 year old Marcher from Southfield, Michigan***

These represent the most typical responses. There were also those who asserted that they had always been tolerant and that the March either had no effect on their thinking in this area or that it merely reinforced their attitudes.

A small minority, 11%, offered the view that the March had actually made them less tolerant. This was most true of those who went more recently and their reasoning is instructive:

“Seeing everything gives me an unforgiving type of anger.” **A 17 year old from Quebec, Canada**

“Obviously it has made me angrier towards the Nazis and less tolerant of people who breed prejudice towards the Jews.” **A 18 year old from Englewood, New Jersey**

“I’m less tolerant of people saying bad things about Judaism. Now I’m more sensitive. I don’t like people who don’t know what they’re talking about because it will misinform others.

A 20 year old student from San Diego, California

It can be hypothesized that with the passage of time a more nuanced perspective emerges. As participants get older they learn about other examples of intolerance—towards Hutus and Tutsis, Bosnians, animist Sudanese, Kurds, etc., and they come to realize that Jews are not the only peoples who have suffered. It may also be that 9/11, suicide bombings in Israel, and the recent rise in world-wide anti-Semitism have had an immediate effect on adolescents for whom these events are a defining experience at a critical point in their development. If the latter is true, then these opinions may well harden in the coming years.

Attitudes are important. They reflect on how people conduct themselves in their everyday lives. But did the positive views towards others translate into concrete action? Apparently yes, for a sizeable minority. Asked whether they were involved in any social causes, i.e. advocacy on behalf of the homeless, the poor, minority groups, women, etc., 32% said they were and an equal number credited the March with a role in that decision. Interestingly, by a 2 to 1 margin, participants were involved in general, as opposed to, exclusively Jewish causes. This may not please Jewish organizations, but it does speak to the universal lessons drawn by participants as a result of going on the March of the Living.

Holocaust Deniers and Anti-Semitism

Not surprisingly, almost all March participants felt that they had become far better equipped to counter the claims of Holocaust deniers as a result of going on the March. It's not that the March gave them new information. Rather, it made it possible for them to respond to such attacks by saying: 'I've been there. I've seen the camps and I know.' In addition, 95% of those who went told interviewers that the trip had made them more aware of the need to become involved when confronted by anti-Semitism. And in 35% of the cases, students reported having become more of "a campus activist" in this area. They felt a responsibility to act on their newly gained knowledge.

Jewish Identity

If the most important goal of the March was to increase Jewish identity, it clearly succeeded. Over 93% of those who participated reported that it did. This is especially noteworthy because so many of those attending were strongly identifying Jews to begin with, having received some form of Jewish education and belonging to Jewishly identified families.

Looking at Jewish rituals, 29% reported an increase in a variety of observances, such as praying, lighting candles, or keeping kosher. Interestingly, most of those practices were the ones requiring a high

level of commitment, such as Sabbath observance vs. attending a seder. What this means is that levels of commitment increased, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Indeed, 81% cited the March as a factor in their decision.

The greatest levels of increased observance were found in the 1992 (32%) and in the 2003 (35%) group. The 1999 group reported a somewhat lower increase, 21%. This may be due, possibly, to the fact that the 1992 group has gone through the sometimes turbulent period of college life and settled into a more community-bound lifestyle. As for the 2003 cohort, their members, mostly college freshmen, are still under the influence of their parents, with the years of experimentation and striking out on their own still ahead of them.

The March experience clearly resulted in an overall greater interest in things Jewish. Two thirds of those interviewed said they were taking Jewish studies courses and 55% noted that the March had propelled them in this direction. This was true across the board for participants, regardless as to when they went.

Career Choices

Of particular interest was whether or not participants had made a career decision that was in any way influenced by the March. This is obviously a much more significant and long-lasting decision than observing certain rituals, joining a Jewish organization, or taking a course and even a small percentage would represent a major accomplishment by the program. In reality, only the 1992 group responses should be counted since those who went in 2003 are just entering college and the 1999 cohort has just finished college, too early to measure such an impact.

Looking at the 1992 group, the results are revealing. About 24% report that the March affected their career choice. For a program that is of two weeks duration to be credited with a life determining decision

for about one out of four participants is truly impressive. Let's examine these results a bit more closely:

Not surprisingly, a good number, though by no means most, of the careers, related to the Jewish community. Take, for example, a 28 year old, Chicago native who works as a fund-raiser for the Holocaust Memorial Museum. She attended afternoon school as a child and currently belongs to a Conservative synagogue:

"I wasn't always looking into Jewish organizations for work. Actually, I fell into this job, but I pursued it because of my personal interest. It definitely had to do with the March. It's my second career. The first was in public relations."

Others went into teaching in Hebrew school, Jewish organizational work, and social work for Jewish agencies. In all of these cases, the March was credited with both sparking and sustaining their interest in things Jewish. Under girding it was often a desire to share what they had learned with others, to teach and to inspire.

For some, the March led them to study for advanced degrees that combined Jewish and general interest, like a 30 year old New Yorker and day school graduate who has decided to pursue a master's degree in international affairs. As she put it: "This is partially due to my patriotic feelings for America and to my love for Israel, which stems significantly from the March."

The March experience did not, by any means, lead exclusively into Jewishly oriented endeavors. In fact, the majority selected secular careers that reflected larger and more general impacts. This is not so surprising, since career decisions are often the outcome of numerous factors, all of which tend to interact with each other. Reconstructing the process is complex and requires in-depth interviewing and analysis. Several respondents entered politics, where the connection to the March was there, but emerged only after probing:

"I was in politics for six years. This was not directly influenced by the March of the Living. But the general interest in activism was no doubt sparked by seeing what happens when you don't do anything".

A 29 year old participant from Palo Alto, California

For others it was the related area of public service:

"The March made me decide on a career in public service. I did not go into Jewish public service. I did not want to become a Holocaust scholar."

For a 28 year old Boston native, entry into the helping professions was clearly related to the March:

"I became a social worker. I felt like part of my role as a group leader on the March - I was a leader through B'nai Brith Youth Organization - was to help the other kids, console them when they were feeling upset. Maybe it wasn't my role, but I ended up doing that. I helped them deal with and process what was going on."

Another respondent, from Miami, credited the March with her choice of medicine as a career, saying, "Though the March wasn't the only factor, it definitely played a role in my decision to help needy people by becoming a doctor."

The following participant selected teaching as a career because she viewed education as a tool for dealing with prejudice:

"I became a teacher and public school administrator. When you see the effects of ignorance first-hand, you have to be able to accept the fact that the Holocaust was able to happen because of that. When you see it on that level, it has a huge effect on you. And if you can eliminate ignorance through your work, then a career in education is the right option." ***A 29 year old St. Louis program participant***

A number of respondents----environmentalists, scientists, etc., extracted lessons in unconventional ways. Take, for example, the following:

“The March influenced me 110%, because I’m now a professional writer. It made me aware of the importance of writing, reviving the dead by writing. It made me aware of the power of writing. The only way that history was transmitted was through writing. At the camps there’s not actually that much to see in terms of peoples’ lives. Hair, yes. But writing can tell about peoples’ lives. The March affected me very profoundly in the sense of teaching me the connection between writing and memory.” **A 27 year old New Yorker**

Finally, there were those for whom everything they did, including their profession, was viewed through the crucible of the March:

“I was affected because of everybody I came into contact with through the March. They were such smart people with such high ambitions. I ended up going to law school and then dropping out because I hated it. But the aspirations of everyone on the March just had such a positive impact on me.

A 27 year old marketer from St. Louis

Others cited similar effects, ranging from being more empathetic to people, to increased levels of independence and self-confidence. These are the subtle, yet critical effects that such intense programs can have on the lives of those who go through them.

Long Range Effects of the Program

Respondents were asked about the effects of the March on their “thinking as a Jew.” The results were as follows:

A great deal:	41.7%
Quite a bit:	42.7%
Some effect, but not a lot:	12%
Affected me slightly:	2.6%
None at all:	1%

Past participants were also asked about the impact of the March on their “behavior as a Jew”:

A great deal:	22.5%
Quite a bit:	35.9%
Some effect, but not a lot:	30.5%
Affected me slightly:	6.7%
None at all:	4.4%

Both sets of responses make it abundantly clear that the March had an important impact on most participants. Of equal interest was which aspects of the March were most appealing. More people ranked the visits to the camps as very important than other aspects of the trip (93%). This was followed by the Israel segment of the trip (57%), the March itself (47%), and then the visits to towns, museums, and other sites (31%).

Respondents were asked to express their thoughts about the March’s long-term importance for their lives. Several respondents were critical of the March, charging that it played upon and manipulated peoples’ emotions, but those feeling this way represented perhaps 2% of those who went. On the whole, the results provide a rich tapestry of emotions and thoughts that reveal the March to have been a pivotal part of their lives. They support the idea, demonstrated in other research, that an experience of short duration can, if sufficiently intense, permanently change a person’s perceptions and life. In the end it is quality and content, not length of time that determines a program’s success. It is clear from the results that the March of the Living has been able to accomplish its objectives in terms of greatly enhancing the Jewish commitment, identification, and behavior of its participants. The following quotes are offered as just a small concluding sample of what this program has achieved:

2003 Participants

“Well you can’t feel anything immediately after you get back. But when you pass lakes or ponds, you remember going through Birkenau and seeing the ash pond. When you’re in Jewish neighborhoods, you respect Jews more. When people fight over stupid things, I tell them not to. In Israel, when you’re with really Orthodox people, you understand where they’re coming from. It’s our history.”

Scarsdale, NY, age 17

“The March had a great effect on how I feel about everything. A current example is York University. I’m in a course with a professor, learning about Hitler. The course is called: “The Modern Age—Shapers and Definers.” It’s about people who have influenced the world. The section on Hitler is actually positive. It covers before the war and the things he did for the economy. I said to the professor: “You are providing a sympathetic view of Hitler, which is completely misleading to those who don’t understand.” So as a result they are in the process of changing the course. The section on Hitler might be taken out of the course or how it’s taught might be changed. I wonder if I would have been as outspoken and confident if I hadn’t gone on the March.”

Thornhill, Ontario, Canada, age 19

“My grandfather is a survivor—he’s 78 years old. I wanted him to go with me on the March, and I convinced him to come. He hesitated a little, but after he saw my determination, he was excited, even though he was also very scared. There’s a great bond now between me and my grandfather, and between my friends and me and my grandfather. They loved him. We grew together, cried together, laughed together. After you experience something like that, you all change together. We matured very quickly over those two weeks. My grandfather was very close to one of his camps when we were there. He’s my hero.” ***Palm Beach, Florida, age 18***

1999 Participants

“It opened my eyes. In school you learn about the Holocaust from a textbook, but on the March you see it first hand. You see things with your own eyes, you hear things with your own ears, and you talk to people yourself. What affected me the most was the reaction of the Polish people. I remember going to Majdanek and seeing

Poles who lived on the other side of the fence and saw the camp from their own backyards. And I thought: 'How could they do that, wake up every morning and see such a thing?' And there are still people who deny it happened." **Montreal, Quebec, Canada, age 22**

"It definitely gave me a new perspective on life. You can learn about them in a textbook, but on the trip you really "get it." One leaves with a new appreciation of what the survivors went through. It affects everyone differently but it creates a bond with everyone on the trip. The March also made me appreciate Israel more. And, after seeing everything first-hand, I can now have an intelligent conversation about the events."

Montreal, Quebec, Canada, age 21

"It made me more conscious of not just my Jewishness, but of the past history of my people, and of the vibrant world wide community I am a part of. On my March I was surrounded by Jews from Panama, France, and Israel. It was phenomenal and triumphant to be there. The March was also amazing in how it teamed up survivors with young people. And the Israel segment was one of the factors that inspired me to come to Israel on my own, which I have done each year since the March." **Denver, Colorado, age 21**

1992 Participants

"The March was a phenomenal experience. It was probably the best thing I've ever done. It's made me a better person. I do public speaking. The survivors aren't going to be around forever. Somebody has to tell their story and if they can't do it I will. We went to a synagogue in Warsaw. They brought us in the back door and out the back door. The night before we got there had been anti-Semitic graffiti on the wall. And the kids and bus captains went there to paint over the graffiti. We were a target. We were stopping traffic. Everybody was angry because we felt we were being stalked. But we weren't being stalked. We were the news. We were the first group to go after the fall of Communism. That's why there was graffiti on the shul—because they could. They had the freedom to do what they wanted. The Israel portion was a good way to detox. I wasn't ready to come home after the March. I needed that week without family, without questions." **Miami, Florida, age 29**

“I was this superstar baseball player in high school and I gave up two weeks of baseball season to go on the March. I got a lot of flack for it because I was the captain and it was definitely the greatest decision I made in high school. This girl from Switzerland was hysterical. It turns out her grandfather was an artist waiting to get killed who had carved something into his bunk in Birkenau. And she saw what he had carved. Then there were these punk Polish kids who threw rocks at us. I tried to get at them, but my counselor pulled me back by the collar. Later, in Tykocin, I waved to a 3 year old and he shot me a sieg heil. I realized the Holocaust could still happen.”

New York City, age 30

“I definitely credit the March of the Living with having a huge impact on my life as a young Jewish woman. I never really wanted to go to Israel when I was young. I was not raised in a Zionist home. Yet after learning about the March at a BBYO summer program, I decided that I wanted go see the remnants of the Holocaust. The trip enabled me to do both. I thought I would go to Israel, get it out of my system and never go back. Right? It soon became clear to me that one week was not enough time to spend in Israel, so I promised myself at the end of my trip that I would return to Jerusalem for my junior year in college. So I did. I graduated, worked for a year, then returned to Israel for another year. I am currently working in the Jewish organizational world. I have a master’s in social work from Columbia University and a master’s in Jewish studies from the Jewish Theological Seminary. Even today, when I apply for programs, I often refer to my experience on the March of the Living.”

Berkeley, California, age 27