



# OUR JOURNEY TOWARD CANADA'S HOLOCAUST MONUMENT

Personal Reflection by  
Gail Dexter Lord  
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*Our Journey to the National Holocaust Monument begins in the Spring of 2013, when we received a Request for Qualifications from the Government of Canada.*

In our more than 35 years as the world's leading cultural planning firm, we have successfully responded to countless proposal calls in Canada and internationally. But this was different. Generations of Canadians had yearned for a memorial to the Holocaust in our national capital. We were inspired and galvanized by the challenge to create the first and only national symbol commemorating the Holocaust in Canada.

As Jewish Canadians, the Holocaust is imbedded in our consciousness and with that comes tremendous responsibility. A responsibility to honour the millions of men, women and children murdered under Nazi rule during the Holocaust. And a responsibility to recognize the some 40,000 Canadian survivors who contributed so much to Canada to whom this Monument would be dedicated. And the truly awesome responsibility to create a monument that would speak to all Canadians in all our diversity. We decided to pour our hearts into this endeavour. It became clear early on that the only way we could succeed in communicating the significance of the Holocaust to all Canadians was to build a team that was both multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural.

We decided to approach the most creative and empathetic design professionals we know: world-renowned architect Daniel Libeskind, Montreal-based landscape architect Claude Cormier, Governor General award-winning artist and photographer Edward Burtynsky and University of Toronto Holocaust scholar Doris Bergen. Would they accept to work in this non-traditional competition on a team lead by cultural planners? To our delight they all accepted. Of the hundreds of teams who submitted their qualifications, only five were selected to advance to the next phase to develop a concept for the new monument; the Lord team being one of the five. In the fall of 2013, we quickly mobilized to begin the next leg of this journey – the concept.

From the outset, we knew, as a team, that we wanted this Monument to be different from other sites of remembrance. We wanted to change how people understand monuments – to go beyond passive viewing. This Monument had to be experiential whereby the experience unfolds as the visitor passes through the space. And above all we wanted the experience to be compelling. It needed to engage all



From left to right: Tony Fares, NCC; Carla Swickerath, Studio Daniel Libeskind; Rachel Beriault, PCH; Gail Lord; Edward Burtynsky; Daniel Libeskind; Laura Grossman; Dov Goldstein; William Lazos, muralist; Chaouki Dakdouki, PCH; Francine Lefebvre, PCH; Susan Fisher, NCC.

people, regardless of background or level of subject matter knowledge.

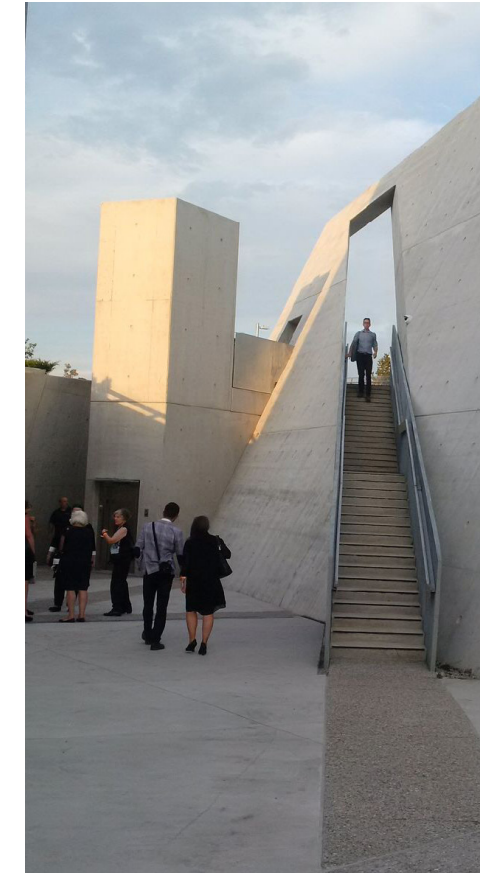
We were also aware of the many challenges of designing a Holocaust monument. How do we commemorate events and atrocities that occurred in the 1930's and 40's? How do we create a Monument in Canada when the events of the Holocaust did not take place here? How do we interpret and communicate the Holocaust into narratives that make sense to local audiences? How do we create a memorial of national significance for all Canadians when the events of the Holocaust are not directly connected to our national history?

It was important that a monument built in Canada, in the Nation's capital, strike a balance between the Holocaust's universal significance and the Canadian context. This balance had to be expressed through the spaces of the monument, its relationship to the adjacent Canadian War Museum, the vistas toward Parliament Hill, the materials, the architecture, the landscape and the art.

Our journey to the Monument was a true collaboration. The concept integrated all disciplines – architecture, landscape architecture, photography,

interpretation and history. Each team member inspired and informed the others throughout the entire design process with a commitment to create a true landmark, contributing the highest level of professionalism, creativity, sensitivity and respect to this most heart rending project. Early in our design process, we decided that to communicate to future generations, the Monument needed to speak in contemporary visual language. Since there is a section of the monument that documents the history of the Holocaust, we thought it would be important to remind people that the most egregious crimes against humanity are often hidden from view. Dov Goldstein and Edward Burtynsky made a pilgrimage to Holocaust sites across Europe to record what these sites look like today. The images taken by Edward Burtynsky would become an integral component of the Monument.

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The design of the Monument was conceived as two physical ground planes – a plane that descends into the Monument and one that ascends with a view toward Parliament Hill – a symbol of democracy, of hope and the future. Daniel Libeskind’s architecture of triangular, concrete, intersecting volumes references the triangular symbols used by the Nazis to identify homosexuals, Roma Sinti, Jehovah’s Witnesses and political and religious prisoners that marked them for death. These volumes were organized such that they create the outline of a star – the star that millions of Jews were forced to wear by the Nazis throughout Europe, in ghettos and in camps, to exclude them from humanity and mark them for extermination.

Integrated within the built form is Claude Cormier’s landscaped forest of conifer trees emerging from the pebbled ground, symbolic of survival in Canada. Burnished on the concrete walls are Edward Burtynsky’s haunting large-scale photographic murals capturing the physical scars of the Holocaust in Europe today. Throughout the project, Professor Doris Bergen provided historical context and scholarship, while Lord led and managed the team and process as well as contributing the curatorial and interpretive elements.

Our concept – Landscape of Loss, Memory and Survival – was ultimately selected by the project’s most eminent jury. And for the following three years, the team continued with design development and refinement, interpretation and content development and ultimately construction, all the while remaining true to the initial concept.

It has been an honour to be entrusted with the responsibility of achieving this Monument; to create a place of meaning and value for Holocaust survivors and all Canadians. We are proud to have created a space that will stand as a reminder of the dangers of state-sponsored hatred and antisemitism while reaffirming respect for human dignity, courage and resilience. And it is our hope that this Monument continues to be a place of memory and mourning, honouring and commemorating, questioning and learning.

We are grateful for the support, dedication and personal investment from the National Holocaust Development Council, the Departments of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Canadian Heritage who have championed this project from the beginning. We would also like to acknowledge the incredible efforts of the university student who initiated the idea of a monument and the Ministers who advocated for it and to the National Capital Commission who has been so instrumental in making it a reality.

## “Our Concept: Landscape of Loss, Memory and Survival”

### National Holocaust Monument Design Team

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Lord Cultural Resources, *Team Lead*

Studio Libeskind, *Architect*

Edward Burtynsky, *Artist, Photographer*

Claude Cormier & Associés, *Landscape Architect*

Doris Bergen, *Holocaust Historian*