



Mitya Bykov

Statue dedication speech

Ladies and gentlemen of Kingsborough College, distinguished guests, friends, and beloved family, today marks a lifetime's dream come true for me. I am so fortunate and happy to be here with you to pay tribute to the 6 million Jewish people, and countless other people, who were lost in the horrors of the Holocaust. My family and I are honored to donate the Infinity statue to the community of Kingsborough Community College, so that the memories of the fallen, and the stories of survivors, live on.

I remember being 5 years old and, like my friends, running after returning Russian soldiers, grabbing their coat, and shouting "Papa, Papa, Papa!" Of course, it was not my papa. My father, Yefim Bykov was fighting the Germans, and while he ultimately fought all the way to Berlin, and helped Russia win the war, he didn't know what was happening to his own family back home. I was 18 months old when my holocaust experience began. I do not remember that time. I asked my mother about it as I grew older, and little by little, she described the horrors of that time to me. 33 members of my family, including me, my grandmother Sima, mother Rosalia, and sister Emma, were transported from Odessa to the town of Bogdonovka in the Transistria region. 54,600 people were killed at the extermination camp there. She told me of babies clinging to their mother's breast as they died. She told me of loved-ones being shot in front of her eyes. Only 127 of us survived that nightmare. I recently completed a project in Bogdonovka, where we planted 127 trees on the site of the camp, in honor of the survivors of the Nazi massacre. I hope that the rustling of the leaves growing on those trees whispers our stories, reminds the world of the horrors of that place.

I am lucky to have survived. It feels like a gift from God, to be able to deliver my testimony of endurance to our community. I now stand in front of you, almost 80 years old, a proud father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, hoping that you all join me in paying my respects to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust. I hope you join me in dedicating the Infinity statue to this learning community in the hopes that while the injustices of the past can be forgiven, they must not be forgotten. We must move forward with understanding, so that future generations recognize and never repeat the horrors inflicted on me, my family, and our community. We dedicate the Infinity statue so we never forget!

Thank you.