

June 11, 1984

# Holocaust

## Polish Survivor's Memories Move Students

By Joan Little  
Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Before he spoke to freshman students Friday at Mehlville Senior High School, Harry Lenga thanked them "for the privilege of letting me speak."

But when he was finished, it was the students, some with tears in their eyes, who gave a standing ovation to Lenga. They crowded around him afterwards, shaking his hand or giving him a hug and a kiss.

Lenga, 63, of Olivette, survived four years in seven Nazi concentration camps, including Auschwitz, before he was liberated May 5, 1945.

Born in Kozenice, a town near Warsaw, Poland, Lenga told story after story of cruelty by the Germans to the Polish Jews. His talk capped a week of Holocaust studies at Mehlville. The program on the mass murder of Jews by Germany during World War II was initiated by Jim Nagel, a civics teacher. Nagel was assisted by the St. Louis Center for Holocaust Studies.

Speaking with a heavy accent and sometimes in broken English, Lenga said he hoped the students would repeat his stories to their own children.

"You'll be the eyewitnesses to tell future generations that things like this happened," said Lenga. "That never

again should happen something like that."

Lenga told of how almost everyone in his hometown of Kozenice — about 10,000 people — had been shipped off by train to the death camp Treblinka, where they were executed by poison gas. On the train were 68 of Lenga's relatives, including his parents, a brother and a sister.

Lenga told how he and his brother Morris missed being put on the train because they were working in a nearby labor camp. But they heard the train as it pulled out of Kozenice.

"I'll never forget that whistle of that train," he said.

In the camps, Jewish prisoners were shot to death at the merest whim of guards. Lenga saw hundreds of people executed. He estimated that 100 to 150 people died that way each day.

"There wasn't a day they didn't kill somebody," he said. "To kill an inmate was like for somebody to smoke a cigarette."

Inmates were shot because their clothes were torn, or because they hadn't shaved, Lenga said. He said that he and his bunkmates would stay up at night in the dark, pinning their torn clothes in order to "look good."

Lenga said that once he nearly had been shot by a guard who accused him of not working hard enough. Without

thinking, Lenga talked back, and the guard unshouldered his gun and pointed it at Lenga. But Lenga was able to talk his way out of it "by showing the guard how fast I could work," he said with a laugh.

Lenga told the students that he was convinced that his strong will to live kept him alive. He and other prisoners once were forced to undress and stand outdoors for four hours in temperatures that reached 15 degrees below zero. At one point Lenga touched his head and found it covered with ice.

"And do you know something, I didn't even cough," he said. "Other people caught pneumonia, but I didn't. That will in me was so strong to survive. I protected with my mind my body."

During a question session, Lenga rolled up his sleeve and showed his tattooed concentration camp number to the students.

"Do you still have nightmares?" one girl wanted to know.

"Many nights, I have nightmares," he said. In his dreams, Lenga says he is still running and hiding from his German tormentors. "My wife, she knows, and she wakes me up," he said with a smile.

One student asked Lenga how he could have seen so much brutality and still kept his sanity. Forty years later,



Harry Lenga

*"I'll never forget"*

Lenga said, he still asks himself the same question.

"Is it possible I saw all those things happen?" said Lenga, almost as if to himself. "And I'm still sane, I still exist and I still think raight?"

Lenga said people have asked why

See HOLOCAUST, Page 2

June 11, 1984

## What's For Lunch

School Lunch Menu  
Week of June 11

### ST. LOUIS CITY

MONDAY: Fried chicken, potato salad, rolls, gelatin, fruit juice, milk.

TUESDAY:

No lunch served. WEDNESDAY:  
Peanut butter bar, salad, apple, milk.

THURSDAY: No lunch served.

# Holocaust

## From page one

he didn't resist. But he said the Germans were well organized. The Germans, he said, had such an effective spy system that people were afraid to even talk resistance. And if one person was caught resisting, his entire family was shot in front of the entire town.

Would he fight today if the same thing happened? For a moment, Lenga's gentle manner changed, and his eyes flashed anger. He said he would have fought back then if he and other Jews had known the German's intentions.

"With my bare hands I would have fought. I would have scratched their eyes out," he said.

A student asked if Lenga had any desire to go back to Auschwitz or the other camps.

No, Lenga replied, he had no desire to go back. But he said that he had promised himself long ago that he would like to visit an Austrian castle on the Danube River. He said he used to gaze at the castle through a window in the labor camp at Melk.

"I used to envy the birds flying to the castle. They were so free. That's when I promised myself — if I live through this, I want to visit that castle," Lenga told the students. "I haven't been yet there, but I still hope I can see it."