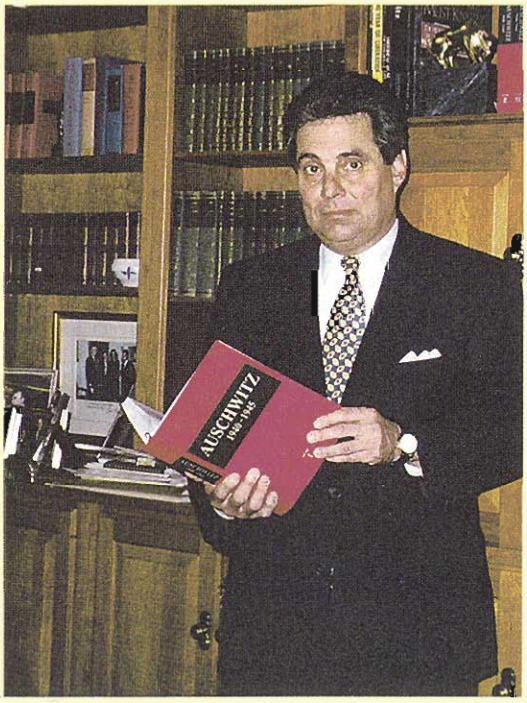
Keeping Memories Alive

The mere utterance of the words Auschwitz and Buchenwald evokes painful images of one of the darkest periods in the history of mankind. Millions of innocent victims—many of them women and children—suffered and died at Nazi concentration camps and killing centers during World War II. Prominent Washington trial attorney **Warren L. Miller, JD '69,** has passionately devoted countless hours over the past decade to ensuring that the world never forgets the unimaginable atrocities that occurred at these and other camps throughout Europe more than half a century ago.

Since 1992, Miller has served as a presidentially appointed member of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. In June, President George W. Bush appointed him chairman of the commission. The 21-member commission was established by Congress in 1985 to assist eastern and central European nations with preserving and protecting historic and cultural sites of importance to Americans. "From the beginning, I expressed interest in working with the former camp sites, as I believe that advancing the cause of remembrance is of utmost importance," says Miller, speaking from the study of his McLean, Va., home, which contains an extensive library of Holocaust-related books. "Memory acts as the most effective deterrent against hatred and intolerance," he believes.

Quickly garnering a reputation as an extremely active and productive commissioner, Miller has worked tirelessly on a non-paid basis to propel a number of important Holocaust memorial projects to fruition. His dedication and perseverance caught the eye of his European counterparts, earning him a prestigious appointment by German government authorities to the board of the Buchenwald and Mittlebau-Dora Memorial Foundation in 1994. Miller is the only American to serve on that board, which is the official entity charged with maintaining the memorial site and museum at Buchenwald, Germany.

"Buchenwald was the first camp liberated by American troops and was one of the largest Nazi concentration camps," says Miller. During his first few months on the board, Miller raised the funds for an important bronze memorial sculpture that he presented to Buchenwald authorities on behalf of the commission at ceremonies commemorating the 50th anniversary of the camp's liberation. Miller spoke at the ceremonies, which were covered live on nationwide German television, and announced that his next project would be to establish a memorial at the infamous "Little Camp" at Buchenwald. "The site, where inmates were subjected to the most barbaric conditions, had been totally neglected for nearly 50 years and was overgrown with trees and brush," says Miller. "I was angry that there was absolutely nothing there to indicate what had happened at the place where the greatest amount of suffering and many of the deaths had occurred."



JAMIE L. FREEDMAN

Miller located a well-known American architect who had been liberated from Buchenwald at age 5. He persuaded him to donate his services to design the memorial. "It could easily have been just a stone edifice or some symbolic structure, but I insisted there be a narrative on the walls of the memorial that accurately describes the horrors that took place at the site—something that would strongly impact future visitors," says Miller. Approximately 700,000 people visit Buchenwald annually. The powerful narrative inscription, which Miller wrote, will appear in six languages on the walls of the memorial.

Miller's legal skills came in handy, as he successfully steered the sensitive project through numerous administrative obstacles, including approval by a curatorium composed of 15 German historians. "It was challenging," he says, noting that it took three years to get the design approved by the group. "How does a nation of perpetrators properly memorialize its victims?" he asks. "I know it was difficult for them—they didn't want to offend anyone." Miller, the sole fundraiser for the project, was able to convince German authorities to share equally in the several hundred thousand dollar cost of the memorial. This October, Miller's seven-year odyssey will finally come to an end, when the imposing structure is officially dedicated.

The completion of the memorial comes directly on the heels of another significant accomplishment that Miller made possible—the translation from Polish into English of what *The New York Times* called "the most complete and authoritative history of the vast killing center for the Nazi extermination of the Jews." Miller singlehandedly raised the funds for the English translation of the five-volume, 1,799-page treatise, entitled *Auschwitz 1940-1945.* "It is absolutely chilling to read, and reflects decades of meticulous research by dedicated historians at Auschwitz, in consultation with Holocaust scholars worldwide," says Miller. The treatise was originally published in Polish in 1995, and later in German. The expanded English version of the work, containing more than half a million words, incorporates hundreds of pages of Russian archival material that was recently released and is widely viewed as a major contribution to Holocaust scholarship.

The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, along with a major donor, dedicated the first three volumes of the treatise to Miller. The work will soon be available on CD-ROM. "I strongly feel that this project is one of the most important things that I've done in my life," says Miller. Asked why, he responds simply, "Books survive."

Neither a Holocaust survivor nor the close relative of survivors, Miller says that his intense interest in the Holocaust is motivated by anger about what happened. "As a lawyer, it is sickening to see what happened in Germany where the legal system was used as an instrument of oppression and death," he says. "Persecution was legal; in fact it was noble. It was encouraged to humiliate, oppress, imprison, expropriate property, and, finally, to kill Jews. Evil, oppression, and genocide still exist in the world today. That is why the cause of remembrance is so important."

—Jamie L. Freedman