Holocaust video wins national award

Film by Next Generations describes how survivors coped immediately after World War II

Lois K. Solomon, Sun Sentinel

6:40 PM EDT, August 12, 2012

Seeking to fill a gap in Holocaust education, a Boca Raton group has won a national award for a film that details survivors' efforts to re-enter society immediately after World War II.

The film, "Life After the Holocaust: Survivors Rebuild Their Lives," won a Telly Award, which honors films, videos and commercials and received 12,000 entries this year. Nancy Dershaw, president of Next Generations, the Boca Raton-based group for children of Holocaust survivors, said she never expected national recognition since the video was designed to teach school children.

"People talk about what happened during the war or what happened after they got to America or Canada or Israel," said Dershaw, whose mother, Esther Mandel, is interviewed in the film. "A lot of us didn't know what happened in between. It was important for us to know how they rebuilt their lives after the war."

This era of refugees and displacement, from 1945 to 1957, has long been glossed over by educators, said Martha Brown, program coordinator at Florida Atlantic University's Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education.

"Usually teachers have a lack of familiarity and a lack of time, and they go right into the Cold War," Brown said. That leaves out illegal immigration to Palestine, American and British policies toward refugees and conditions in displaced persons camps.

For the first time, FAU devoted its summer teaching institute, where 23 public school teachers learn to teach the Holocaust, this past summer to the time period and plans to do the same next summer, Brown said.

Next Generations, founded in 2004, is one of several American "second-generation" groups, in which children of Holocaust survivors seek to understand their parents' experiences and make sure the war remains in the forefront of educational efforts.

Judy Hannes, of Boynton Beach, a group member whose parents fled Germany in 1936, said participants bond together because they were raised with common traits.
"Our parents were overprotective of us, but we protected them at the same time," Hannes said. "We didn't want to cause them any other pain or hardship."

The filmmakers interviewed Samuel Ron, of Delray Beach, who was born in Poland and survived six concentration camps. He found his mother and father after the war, immigrated to Israel in 1946 and moved to the United States in 1956.

"There is no question very little is written about this period of time," said Ron, 88. "We were a nuisance for the Allied armies. They didn't know what to do with us."

Brown said survivors' stories of their post-war challenges are just starting to emerge, and students of the Holocaust are thrilled to hear their stories.

"At the time, they felt an urgency to move forward with their lives. They didn't start talking about until 30 or 40 years later," she said. "It was a missing piece, and now it's coming to life."

To see the award-winning video, go to http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltwZQwsrsWo.