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## Front Page

**Motorcycle ride adds new chapter to story**  
Participant recounts Holocaust project at Tennessee school  
**BY DAVE BENJAMIN**  
Staff Writer



**DAVE BENJAMIN** Renee Kornbluth, who is the daughter of Holocaust survivors, tells members of the Jackson Hadassah chapter about the motorcycle ride she made to Whitwell, Tenn., in support of a fundraising effort that honors victims of the Holocaust.

JACKSON - Most people in America have never heard of the town of Whitwell, Tennessee.

In fact, many people who live in Chattanooga, which is just 34 miles away from Whitwell, may have never heard about the town.

But the focus of a motorcycle ride by a group of about 300 people who are members of the Jewish Motorcycle Alliance (JMA), which includes the Hillel's Angels, The Tribe, the King David Bikers and the Yidden on Wheels, a Toronto, Canada, motorcycle touring club that organized the Paper Clip Ride to Remember, was recently brought to the attention of Jackson's Bat Shalom Hadassah chapter by Renee Kornbluth.

Kornbluth is a motorcyclist and the only woman to ride her own motorcycle with

the Hillel's Angels on the trip to Tennessee. Kornbluth has been an avid motorcyclist for 18 years and has been a teacher of motorcycling at Fairleigh Dickinson University since 1997. She is the daughter of Holocaust survivors William and Edith Kornbluth.

Her parents, who died in 2005, frequently spoke of their experiences to students at Brookdale Community College, Lincroft, where a Holocaust course is offered. The college is also the home of The Center for Holocaust Studies.

William Kornbluth was the author of "Sentenced to Remember: My Legacy of Life in Pre-1939 Poland and 68 Months of Nazi Occupation."

Hadassah programming committee member Cissy Brieff said, "As a tribute to her parents and to commemorate all of those who perished in the Holocaust, Renee rode with Hillel's Angels in the 2006 Paper Clips Ride to Remember. The ride began (for the Hillel's Angels) in Clinton and ended at the Whitwell Middle School in the tiny hamlet of Whitwell, Tenn."

With that, Kornbluth told her audience the story of the Whitwell Middle School and a project that has brought the school international recognition.

"Back in 1998 the principal of the school, Linda Hooper, decided it was necessary to teach the children of Whitwell about diversity," Kornbluth said. "Whitwell is a very tiny town of 1,600 people. All of the people are white fundamentalist Christians. There is nobody of any other religion there, nor is there anyone who was born in any other country. It's a very sheltered place."

Hooper, Vice Principal David Smith and language arts teacher Sandra Roberts

July 12, 2007

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discussed the idea of diversity and decided they would develop a diversity program.

"Linda sent David to a workshop in Chattanooga, where he learned a little bit about the Holocaust. He came back and said, 'I think we should focus on the Holocaust for our diversity,'" Kornbluth said.

The administrators eventually developed an after-school program with 16 student volunteers who worked with them to set up the new program.

"These kids never heard anything about the Holocaust," Kornbluth explained. "They were floored. They couldn't believe such things could happen. When they were told that six million Jews died, some of the children asked, 'What's six million?'"

The children had never seen six million of anything and they needed something tangible to collect in order to understand the concept of a number that high, she said.

"They talked about pennies, but that's a lot of pennies," she said.

One child suggested paper clips.

"It turned out that the Norwegians wore paper clips on their lapels to show their solidarity with the Jews during World War II," Kornbluth said. "As a matter of fact, paper clips were invented in Norway."

The children went home and began collecting paper clips until they had a few thousand, but that didn't make a dent in the six million they were trying to collect.

Smith, the vice principal, suggested creating an Internet Web site, which brought in a trickle of paper clips and here and there they would get a letter or two, she said.

"Then there was a 92-year-old woman named Lena Gitter who was a friend of two German White House foreign correspondents, Peter and Dagmar Schroeder," Kornbluth said. "Lena Gitter just happened to be surfing the net and came across the paper clips project. She brought it [to the attention of] the German reporters and the reporters came to Whitwell. They wound up writing nine articles for German newspapers. They even wrote a book about it and the paper clips started pouring in."

Kornbluth said the school received letters, many of them from Germany, some of which were letters of apology from German people. There were also letters from German school children.

"Paper clips came in from people all across the United States, all 50 states, many of them came with letters," she said. "Artifacts were also sent."

Many celebrities and even President Bill Clinton sent paper clips, she said.

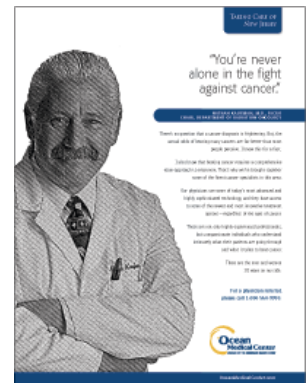
"Eventually they wound up with 30 million paper clips," said Kornbluth. "We're talking about a very small middle school in this poor town of Whitwell getting overrun by paper clips. There were bins and cartons of paper clips everywhere."

Kornbluth said there were also 30,000 artifacts that were sent by people and the school administrators did not know what to do with all of them.

Brainstorming the situation, Dagmar Schroeder and Hooper decided to create a memorial at the school. They needed something to put the paper clips into and hoped to get a German rail car from World War II. The idea turned out to be more difficult than they thought.

"Dagmar and Peter received donations from many German people and eventually they brought an authentic German rail car to the little town of Whitwell," Kornbluth told the audience. "It was [actually] in transport during 9/11."

The rail car was refurbished by Whitwell residents, a park was created and local artists made butterfly decorations as symbols of life and as a



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remembrance of the children of the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

Kornbluth said 11 million paper clips of the 30 million that had been collected were placed inside the rail car to remember all of the people who died in the Holocaust, not only the Jewish victims.

A children's Holocaust monument was built and 11 million paper clips were placed inside that location.

The children of Whitwell decided that they wanted to give the remaining eight million paper clips they had collected to other children who wanted to study the Holocaust or related topics.

As a result of the project, Holocaust survivors came to speak with the students.

In 2004 the film "Paper Clips" was released which chronicled the story of the Whitwell project.

The project was also the inspiration for the 2006 Paper Clips Ride to Remember, a fundraiser for the Whitwell Middle School, Kornbluth said.

"Donations were sent from friends, relatives and people I didn't even know," she said, explaining that the JMA collected \$60,000. The funds are expected to go toward the creation of a visitors center to display the 30,000 artifacts that were sent to Whitwell. In addition, some items the school needs are also expected to be purchased with the proceeds of the motorcycle ride fundraiser.

"The people of Whitwell are very poor," Kornbluth told the audience in Jackson. "It was a mining town and there was a terrible accident and the mines closed down. The school was extremely run down, [but as a result of the paper clips project] donations have been coming in from a variety of sources and the kids are going to have a new school."

Bat Shalom Hadassah members were then treated to a film about the JMA motorcycle ride. The film was directed by Mitchell Belman. For more information about "Paper Clips: A Ride to Remember," which was shown at the 15th annual Toronto Film Festival, contact Mitchell Belman at [mitch@locochico.com](mailto:mitch@locochico.com).

More information about Hillel's Angels can be found at [www.hillelsangels.com](http://www.hillelsangels.com).

The film "Paper Clips" which tells the story of the Whitwell Middle School Holocaust project is available on DVD.

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