By Monique Roy

On November 9, 1938, an orchestrated whirlwind of destruction was unleashed on the Jews of Germany. From the streets of Berlin to the smallest towns of Germany and Austria, more than a thousand synagogues were set on fire and destroyed. Tens of thousands of Jewish shops and homes were ransacked and Jewish books were burnt to ash. In 24-hours of violence, 91 Jews were killed and more than 30,000 Jewish men and boys were sent to concentration camps. With shattered glass covering the streets of Germany, the Nazi pogrom became known as Kristallnacht: the Night of the Broken Glass. The event was the turning point toward the murder of six million Jews in the Holocaust.

Seventy years later, on November 9, 2008, I sat alongside other young American Jews in Germany's largest synagogue, Rykestrasse Synagogue, located in Berlin. As a participant in the American Jewish Committee's ACCESS Program, I looked on in awe as German Chancellor Angela Merkel addressed hundreds of Jews and non-Jews who sat together at a commemoration ceremony to mark the anniversary of the Nazi-incited violence.

"We can't be indifferent to right-wing extremists marching through the Brandenburg Gate or to right-wing extremists winning seats in legislatures," Merkel said, in reference to recent events.

"We can't remain silent when rabbis are accosted on the streets, Jewish graveyards desecrated and anti-Semitic crimes are committed," she said. "Complacency is a first step toward putting the most essential values of our democracy at risk."

Merkel also noted that remembering Kristallnacht is not enough; "we must always think how it was that it could come to this singular event, the Holocaust."

Sitting in one of the restored synagogues that was among the many damaged or destroyed during Kristallnacht was a moving experience. It showed me that there is hope for the future and that as human beings, we can learn from the past and create a better future for future generations. My belief is that with a little knowledge and understanding, these kinds of events can be prevented in the future.

As a Jew, who lost family in the Holocaust, being in Berlin brought on mixed emotions. As I walked the streets of Berlin, I could not help to wonder who the old man was who walked passed me. It is still impossible to comprehend how the annihilation of the Jews even happened.

The shadows of an old Germany is still very much there, but I believe the Germany of today will not forget the Holocaust anytime soon. Reminders of the Holocaust can be seen throughout the streets of Berlin. A vast Holocaust memorial consisting of 2,700 concrete slabs built by American architect Peter Eisenman is a national reminder and lasting symbol of the Holocaust. Abstract to extremes, an individual who visits this memorial may interpret the structure in their own unique way. Standing in front of the gigantic stone structure that made up the memorial, I imagined a large grey maze or graveyard. But the seriousness of the structure may not always be understood. Some children may see it as a large playground, but hopefully its purpose will be explained. The unique Jewish Museum, built by Daniel

Libeskind, follows a fractured pattern similar to the Star of David that Jews were forced to wear during the Nazi regime.

Berlin synagogues, once desecrated by the Nazis are now restored and open their doors to Berlin's growing Jewish population, composed mostly of emigrants from the former Soviet Union. Guarded by German police and high security, these synagogues symbolize the fact that Hitler was unable to destroy an entire race.

Embedded and bronzed into the streets of Berlin are stumble stones (brass cobblestones) bearing the names, birth and death dates of Jews who had once lived at that address, and the names of the concentration camps where they perished. These small reminders are in fact large memorials. As hundreds walk over and passed them each day, they too are reminded.

Each memorial in Berlin and other German cities shows Germany's willingness to come to terms with its past. Germany does have a special responsibility to ensure the Holocaust never happens again.

It's painful to think what my people went through as European Jews during the Holocaust. I know I will always honor them; and as I walked the streets of Berlin, I was proud to be a Jew in a Germany that is no longer enveloped by darkness, but by symbols of hope and courage.

American Jewish Committee's ACCESS Program: Established in October 2007, Germany Close Up – American Jews Meet Modern Germany provides Jewish American students and young professionals in their twenties and early thirties with an opportunity to experience modern Germany up close and personally. Program participants will visit the actual sites of historical events, partake in various aspects of contemporary Jewish life in Germany and engage with Germans of all backgrounds. The purpose of the program is to allow participants to gain their own perspective on Germany through individual experience.