



This "cattle car" is part of an upcoming exhibit at the Museum of Jewish Heritage called "Auschwitz. Not long ago. Not far away."

A 14-TON REMINDER OF TERROR

Nazi-era freight car, like those used in Holocaust, settles onto a city plaza

BY MARIA ALVAREZ
Special to Newsday

A 14-ton Nazi-era "cattle car" — like those used to ferry humans to the Holocaust death camps but also a wood and steel reminder of genocide — descended from a crane onto a Battery Park City sidewalk Sunday and back into the lives of Manhattanites Ray Kaner and her husband Leon.

The couple, both 92 and survivors of the Nazi death camps, were on hand Sunday when the German freight car went on dis-

play at the doorstep of the Museum of Jewish Heritage as part of an upcoming exhibit, "Auschwitz: Not Long Ago. Not Far Away."

Ray Kaner looked at the boxcar as it rested on rails outside the museum, and horrible memories came to the surface.

"These cattle cars are where the mass killings started," said Kaner, who described her life mission as recording the stories of other Jews who survived the Holocaust. She also shares stories of her childhood spent in a Polish ghetto before a boxcar



The rail car was lowered onto Edmond J. Safra Plaza on Saturday.

like the one in Battery Park transported her to Auschwitz. Kaner said she was a teenager before being liberated from the Bergen-Belsen concentration

camp in Germany. Inside the freight cars, Kaner said, 80 people stood or sat in cramped conditions. "There were no windows,

only separations between the wooden beams," Kaner said, her husband by her side. "It was August. The heat, the smell. It was terrible. . . . You could not lay down. Inside there were only urination pails."

The couple married after being liberated and immigrated to New York City in 1946.

Ray Kaner said the German soldiers told her and the other prisoners the "cattle cars would transport us out of the ghetto to a better place. It was all lies."

The Nazis convinced mothers to give up their children with promises they would be reunited, she said.

"Then they saw their little children thrown into trucks," Kaner said. "They realized then

From ditties to Dvorak

Violin program in East New York opens new vistas

BY ROSEMARY MISDARY
Special to amNewYork

Sierra Mitchell, 9, had never held or seen a violin before she started the program at Prince Joshua Avitto Community Center. Now, she practices every day when she comes home from school.

"It's hard and tricky, but when I practice, I make a new sound," said Sierra, one of the first students in the program. "I like playing 'Happy Birthday.'"

A violin program is rare in East New York, where one in four residents live below the poverty line — twice the national average. The Brooklynites living at the end of the No. 3 train line struggle with one of the highest rates of violent crime in the city. The center is named in memory of a 6-year-old who was stabbed to death in the neighborhood in 2014.

"We don't have art programs in the neighborhood. This gives my daughter opportunity," said Jaymi Perkins, whose daughter, Semaj Frank, 8, is in the program. "Violin is not something you get around here."

Demond Pearson, senior program director at the community center, is always searching for new experiences for the kids. Exposure to different activities, says Pearson, allows



Teacher Heathcliff Sygapolho works with Semaj Frank, 8, at the Prince Joshua Avitto Community Center in East New York.

them to see themselves differently.

The idea of a violin program came to Pearson when he saw his friend Heathcliff Sygapolho, 47, with a violin slung across his back. Sygapolho was coming home from his job as a New York City public school teacher.

"It was like a sign," said Pearson who hired Sygapolho to teach the program. "How many black violinists do kids get to see?"

Over 20 years ago, Sygapolho trained under a professional violinist who gave lessons to his fourth-grade class semiweekly. Later, Sygapolho asked the violinist to teach him so he could share it with his students. The

violin has been part of his life and teaching curriculum ever since. Reading musical notes and playing them develops skills in mathematics and reading, Sygapolho said.

The center's violin program — funded by Good Shepherd Services with the help of an NYC Department of Design and Construction grant — started in fall 2018, and has grown to a dozen violinists, ages 6-18. The kids play high-quality violins bought with grant funds, Pearson said.

Holding one of these violins is exciting for Hope Charles, 6, who likes to play "Hickory Dickory Dock."

"I like to go up and down on the violin with the bow; I get pretty sounds," Hope said.

During the Saturday afternoon group lesson at the center, kids learn to hold the violin, and practice moving their fingers and the bow from string to string.

Sygapolho breaks down familiar songs such as "Mary Had a Little Lamb," into small pieces. Each piece is learned and connected over a two-hour lesson.

"Just to see the look on their faces when they are able to play a song — that's what I look for," said Sygapolho. "When I see that light go off, that's what gives me that excitement."

His students double over with laughter every time they get a song right, because Sygapolho jumps up and down with excitement.

When the laughter subsided at a recent lesson, the young violinists returned their chins to their violins and gripped their bows. Sygapolho distributed new sheet music.

As they played, he moved from student to student, checking their form and introducing them to the first notes of Dvorak's "New World Symphony."

Dvorak is no small step from "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," admits Sygapolho. But after their first recital on March 20 at the center, they were invited by Carnegie Hall to attend a concert. He hopes they will get to play the new song for a Carnegie Hall audience one day.

The center plans to expand the program so more kids can join.

"Maybe we can form our own Carnegie Hall in East New York," said Pearson.



Holocaust survivors Leon and Ray Kaner with their son Charles at the installation.

that they were going to be killed."

Scandinavian Roman Catholic nuns saved Kaner and nursed her starving body back to health with biscuits and tea.

"I've heard these stories my whole life," said Kaner's son Charles. "Genocide continues. It gives me nightmares that it happened in Bosnia, Rwanda, Albania, the Turks in Greece."

The exhibition is scheduled to open in May and includes 700 artifacts collected from Auschwitz and never before displayed in the United States. The artifacts represent all victims of the Holocaust, from Poles and Romas to Jehovah's Witnesses and includes the desk of a camp commandant, said Luis Ferreiro, director of Musealia, a Spanish museum exhibition company, that displayed the artifacts in Madrid. The exhibit will also include children's books read to German youth to perpetrate hate against Jews, he said.

Battery Park City resident Tina Yackler said she and her husband were taken aback when they saw the German freight car.

"We were hit with a magnitude of history," Yackler said. "I imagined families inside fearful of the unknown. How did they survive?"

The decision to place the boxcar on a sidewalk outside the museum was not an easy one, said Jack Kliger, museum president and chief executive officer.

"We knew it would be difficult for people to see," Kliger said. "But it is better for people to ask questions and talk about what happened."

Lawyer: Former Knick denies rape

BY DEBORAH S. MORRIS
deborah.morris@newsday.com

The NYPD is investigating a rape allegation against former New York Knicks star Kristaps Porzingis, a police source said. The player's lawyer described the claim as "bogus."

Attorney Roland G. Riopelle said the woman who made the rape claim had been demanding money from Porzingis, 23, for a year following what the lawyer said was a night of consensual sex with his client. Eventually, Riopelle and Porzingis contacted federal authorities when the woman's

demands became "concerning," Riopelle said in a statement.

"We made a formal referral to federal law enforcement on Dec. 20, 2018, based on the accusers' extortionate demands," Riopelle said.

The statement also said that Riopelle and Porzingis contacted the NBA "months ago" and that it is aware of the investigation by federal law enforcement officials.

"It's our position that any sex was consensual and any fair investigation of the facts will show that," Riopelle said.

Police said in an email state-

ment Saturday night: "The NYPD takes sexual assault and rape cases extremely seriously, and urges anyone who has been a victim to file a report."

A Knicks team representative said, "This is Kristaps' personal matter and not related to the Knicks."

Porzingis' current team, the Dallas Mavericks, declined to comment. The NBA did not respond to requests for comment.

Porzingis, who was the No. 4 overall pick in the 2015 NBA Draft by the Knicks, quickly emerged as the franchise's star. He was named to the



Kristaps Porzingis in 2017

first team All-Rookie squad and earned a spot on the All-Star team last season. But he suffered a torn ACL on Feb. 6, 2018. He never played for the Knicks again and was traded to the Mavericks on Jan. 31.

With Anthony M. DeStefano and Steve Popper

COREY SIPKIN

TODD MAISEL

newsday.com NEWSDAY MONDAY, APRIL 1, 2019