

Button Project

Moriah School started the button project on Holocaust Memorial Day, May 2008.

We all sat around the classroom and were told about discrimination and racism. They both sounded pretty horrible to us – but 70 years ago it was so bad that over 10 million people were murdered. Six million of them were Jews and 1.5 million of the Jews were children. Innocent children. That five year period from 1940-1945 was called the Holocaust.

Since that lesson, we have been collecting buttons – 1.5 million buttons! That is one button for each child murdered in the Holocaust. We want to remember and show respect for these children.

Why are we doing this project?

Imagine if the government started making rules for you and other people of your religion, such as – ‘You can’t sit on a park bench’. And then worse rules were made

– ‘You can’t even go into the park’. Well that’s what happened to the Jews.

The Nazis persecuted people who were different than themselves. They shoved everyone they thought ‘wrong’ into ghettos – places fenced off from everything else around. These were designed to hold hundreds of people, but thousands were jammed into them. But if you think these ghettos were bad, there were even worse places. The Jews were taken to concentration camps to work for the Nazis and when they weren’t strong enough to work (which was very often because they were starved and didn’t get a lot of sleep) they killed them off.

As we learnt more about the Holocaust, we began to feel more pride for our project. When we see all the buttons we feel awkward, standing there in front of hundreds of thousands of buttons each representing a dead child. Every time we see the buttons we realise more and more what a tragic thing happened. They were children, young, free and innocent, and their lives were taken away from them, just because they were Jewish and ‘not good enough to live’. We feel protective of the buttons, and we know that they are safe with us.

Creating the memorial sculpture

Because we have learnt so much from the buttons, we decided to share them with others. We thought ‘why not make a big button sculpture that will hopefully remind people of what happened, so that history won’t repeat itself’. We have designed a Holocaust Memorial Sculpture called ‘*Bewildermen?*’ which will house the buttons and give Wellington a way to remember the children of the Holocaust.

Vera Egermayer, a holocaust survivor, told us *“In a time like the Holocaust it is like living in a pitch black room, but every time someone does something nice for you, it’s like them coming in and lighting a candle. You need to focus on the light”*.

We felt so much respect for her and were shocked that she had gone through so much when she was young and innocent and still understood that you need to focus on the light. This reminds us how important it is to help when we see something unfair.

We think *Bewildermen?* will encourage people to think about the lost children. When you walk around the maze, the silence and the feeling of hopelessness will make you feel lost and scared – just like the victims of the Holocaust. As you make your way through the maze, the buttons will make you feel like you’re surrounded by all the dead children. Hopefully, you will feel bonded to the children.

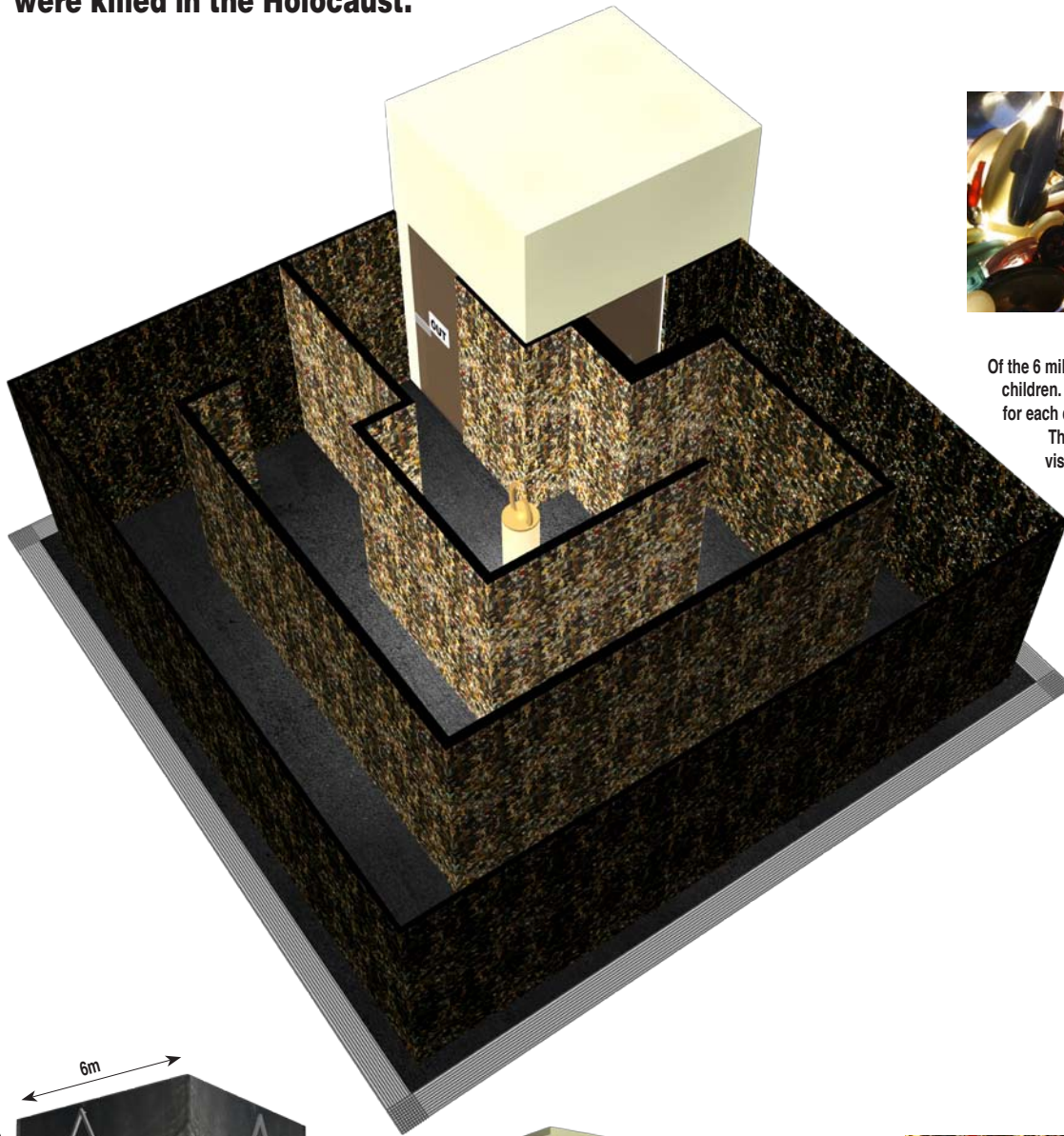
As wrong as the Holocaust was, it can teach us all a very important lesson – we can use it to prevent something as tragic as this from ever happening again. That means if you see someone being teased or mocked about their race or religion you need to stick up for them. A little bit of teasing on the streets could lead to everybody else ganging up on that race or religion. We want everyone to think about this, and we think our button maze will be a valuable memorial that all Wellingtonians can learn from.

The children of Moriah School



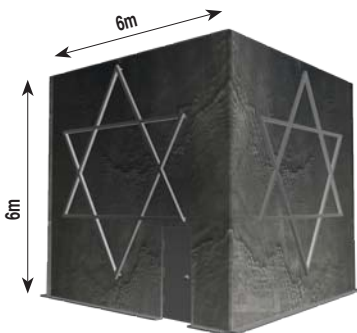
'Bewilderment'

A project by the children of Moriah School in Wellington, as a memorial to the children who were killed in the Holocaust.



Buttons

Of the 6 million Jews killed, 1.5 million were children. The maze walls contain 1 button for each child - that is 1.5 million buttons. The maze has been created so that visitors will walk past every button.



From the outside

The building will be around 6m wide x 6m long x 6m tall. It will be solid concrete with no windows and only one door. Outside it will be stark and depressing - just like the concentration camps the children were taken to. Each side will have a large Star of David made out of scaffolding pipe. Water running down the walls represent the tears of the children.



Transition point

Entering the building brings you into a small room (2m x 2.5m). Visitors will be encouraged to take a moment to be still, to read about the Holocaust, to learn about the button project and the *Bewilderment* memorial. This room allows them to step away from the sounds and sights of the world outside, to quieten their minds and identify with the feelings of a child. There is one door into the maze and a single direction to move around.

Technically this room is also important because it allows for:

- Cheaper construction - only one outside door
- Easier security
- Double door entry into actual maze limiting light and sound spill from outside. The room will have soundproof walls and ceiling.
- Display space for information.



Candle in the centre

Inside the maze will be dark and quiet. Visitors will need to take a moment for their eyes adjust to see the individual buttons and through the gaps try to find the distant light.

In the centre of the maze is a single light shaped like a candle. A simple plaque will quote Vera Egermayer, who has inspired us for the design and experience of the memorial.

"In a time like the Holocaust it is like living in a pitch black room, but every time someone does something nice for you, it's like them coming in and lighting a candle. You need to focus on the light."
- Vera Egermayer

A short audio track will say this quote in each language of the children who were killed.