

Keynote Address
by
Corey Bearak, Chair, Northeast Queens Jewish Community Council
to Jewish War Veterans – Queens County Council
75th Jubilee
Sunday, March 21, 2010
Jewish Center of West Hempstead

Thank you to Jason Kaatz, one of your great leaders, for inviting me to address you at your 75th Jubilee. I am honored and privileged. One thinks this calling would be for those in public office or who achieved much more than I have. Heck, I am a proud parent and in three more days a lucky husband for one-third the number Jubilees you've held - for 25 years.

At the outset, I thank the Queens County Council for honoring me with its Community Service Award. Jason sort of “ambushed” at the last meeting of the Northeast Queens Jewish Community Council, which had some other brief unintended excitement, and presented this award. That I can tell all the members and friends of the Queens County Council – Jewish War Veterans of my grateful appreciation and sincere thanks for this honor, makes this opportunity to keynote this afternoon all the more special to me.



[Jewish War Veterans Queens County Council Commander David Rivkin (left), Corey Bearak and Past State Commander Jason Kaatz present Bearak with his award for community service at Queens County Council-JWV's 75th Jubilee March 21. Photo courtesy of NEQJCC]

At an early age, I played with toy soldiers, watched the war movie – sometimes they repeated every night on million dollar movie. I always liked when there was a Jewish soldier among those portrayed. I also enjoyed reading about the heroic exploits of biblical and later Jewish warriors going back to Abraham's rescue of Lot through the Maccabees and Bar Kochba. The point being many folks today – even with the many military successes of the State of Israel see Jews as accountants, advisors, businesspeople. One of my favorite books, *Ivanhoe* portrays Jews more as merchants.

I for one think it remains important that Jews, our youth in particular, and the public at large recognize us as a multi-faceted people. The facts remains, our tradition values faith and doing good – tikkun olam – and this means to me not just being someone who may attend schul regularly; it does and should mean more; it certainly includes being there for your family; it means striving to do your best in life – how well only limited by one's abilities.

That to mean represents what is special about The Jewish War Veterans. You stand for something. You stood up for our country. You stand up for our people. And from what I know from knowing so many active members, you stand for your families.

And from personal experiences, I know how oft-times, it is not easy. I never personally experienced war. But political and community involvement often brings battles of a different kind.

For much of my adult life, I took stands and as a professional and a Jewish communal activist I recognized the need for stronger penalties for those who commit hate crimes. I will not try to make comparisons to the genocides that the Nazis and others perpetrated not just against Jews.

But trust me, those who commit crimes of hate, including painting a certain Nazi symbol onto the front door of a synagogue less than a mile from my home, scrawling the same hateful sign on the front steps of my son's school or on cars in the Hillcrest-Fresh Meadows community, acted with full knowledge of the fear those signs bring to mind and intended to scare, worry, and inflict harm on us as Jews. Similar acts of hate get inflicted on other communities and we must condemn those as well. I participate in such community gatherings of outrage.

So I remain a bit taken aback when people do not understand the nature of hate crimes. Is a neo-Nazi who paints a swastika on a synagogue, a school, the car or home of a Jewish family the same as a person who spray paints their name on a subway car? We know the difference between hate crimes and other crimes. Hate crimes require stricter penalties.

Nevertheless some folks out there still refuse to see any difference between hate crimes and other crimes and no need for stricter penalties. I simply choose to defend the message that we should support stronger penalties on those who commit hate crimes.

I come from the school one never ceases to learn – and everyday brings an education: Never shy from one's principles and always stand for good and against hate, even when you get placed in the line of fire. If you stand for something, mean it.

The Jewish War Veterans represent so many who stood on the front lines, who defend our democracy, who as veterans and Americans stand against hate and strong defenders of our people. I support and praise your work.

And I might add it would be really cool if my health allows me to double the 25 years my wife and I get to celebrate on Wednesday and address the 100th Jubilee.

Thank you so much.