

The Harvard Crimson

THE UNIVERSITY DAILY SINCE 1873

WEDNESDAY, MAY 6, 2009

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

MAY 6, 2009

THE HARVARD CRIMSON

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Holocaust Survivor Recalls Experience

Oldest known male survivor
draws large crowd to
Science Center

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Leopold Engleithner, the world's oldest-known male concentration camp survivor, recounted the story of his ordeal to a packed Science Center lecture hall on Monday evening.

Students and other attendees overflowed into the stairwell and along the back walls to hear Engleithner, a 103-year-old Jehovah's Witness who was incarcerated by the Nazis for having refused military service.

His presentation was conducted in interview format, with questions posed by graduate student Johann Boedecker. Engleithner's biographer, Bernhard Rammerstorfer, sat alongside the survivor to translate questions into his native Austrian dialect of German.

Before Engleithner spoke, Rammerstorfer told the audience the story of how he first met Engleithner and what he learned from him.

"It was clear for me that this man was something special and that his story could provide valuable lessons for the peaceful co-existence for mankind," he said.

Engleithner's stories ranged from the harrowing—such as the time when he narrowly evaded what would have been a lethal injection of air into his heart after being taken to the camp infirmary—to the fortunate—such as when a mountain guide stalled the Nazis, who were about to find his getaway home in the Alps.

The Center for European Studies sponsored the event in collaboration with Martin M. Wallner '11, a native of Austria who spent two years in the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service before coming to Harvard. He said he was happy with

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Bernhard Rammerstorfer
BIOGRAPHER

the way the event turned out and that Engleithner imparted many lessons, among which was the importance of being thankful.

"I think the most important lesson is that we should be happy, no matter which situation we have to face," Wallner said. "This man had to go through so many problems."

Lorenzo Bartolucci '11, an audience member, said that what he took away from the event was a realization of the difficulty of maintaining personal convictions in the face of adversity.

"It sounds like it was easy. It sounds like it was the right thing, but hearing him speak, hearing all he had to go through to keep his religious convictions, makes you realize that it's a whole different story to keep your beliefs," he said.