

> *Keeping Tabs*

Under the guidance of supporting philanthropists, artists and architects, a group of school children turned trash into a timeless memorial. *Keeping Tabs* holds six million soda tabs, each symbolizing a life lost decades ago. Molybdenum-alloyed stainless steel provides the corrosion resistance to keep this sculpture beautiful and untarnished through the deicing salt-laden winters of the midwestern United States.

In 1996, Bill Walter, a history teacher from Pittsburgh, searched for a tangible way for his middle-school students to comprehend the enormity of the number six million. That represents the number of Jewish people killed in the Holocaust. An additional six million Roma, disabled, Catholic clergy, political dissenters and LGBT people also perished in the holocaust. To visualize this number, Walter selected a commonplace item that they could hold and count – the often-discarded snap-top can tab. Accepting their teacher’s challenge, students began collecting can tabs from around the globe. Regardless of shape, color, or size, no can tab

> The sculpture forms an abstract Star of David when viewed from above.

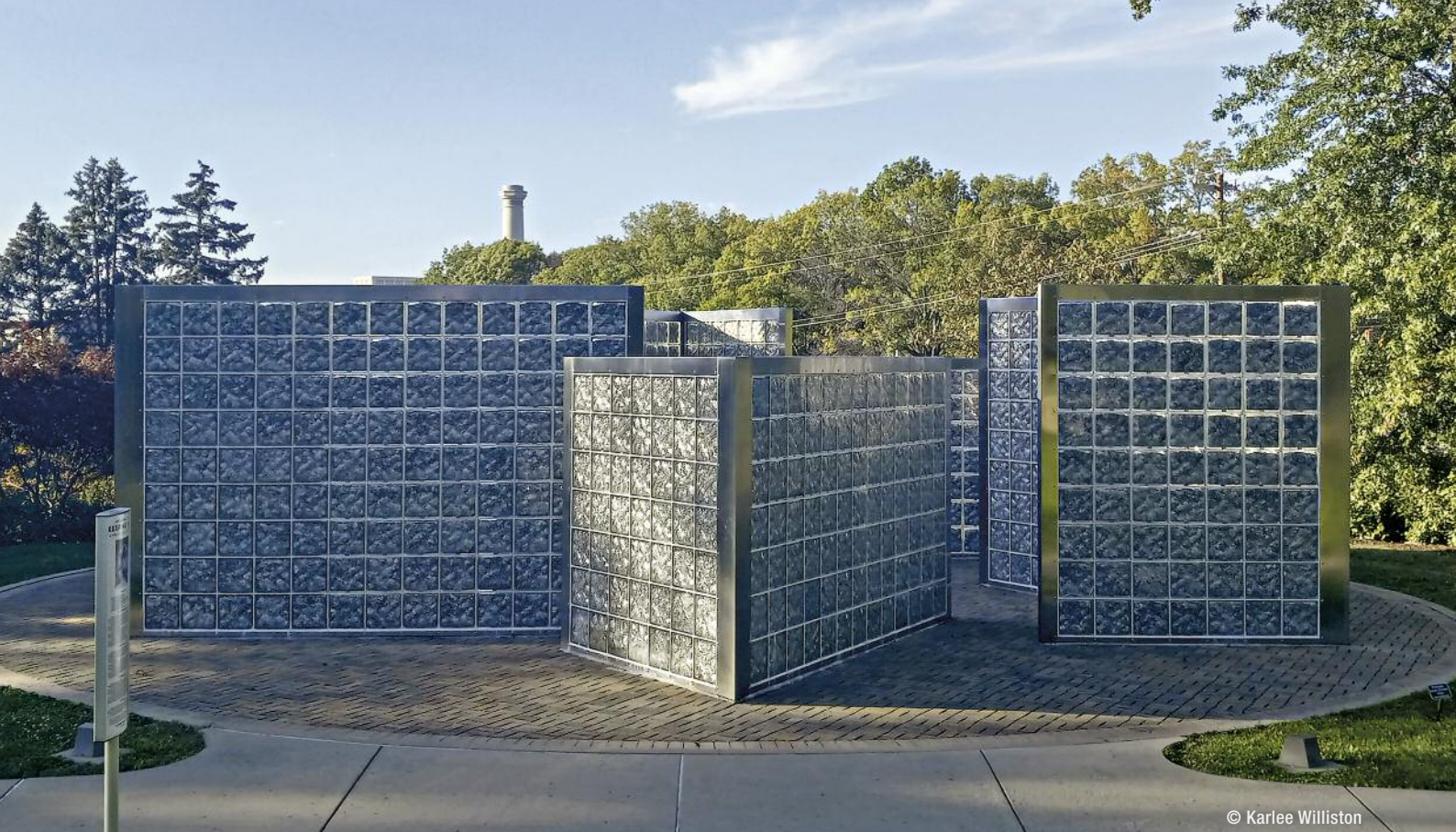


was discarded. Today, they’re displayed in the Nancy and Gary Tuckfelt Memorial *Keeping Tabs: A Holocaust Sculpture*. The sparkling and labyrinth-like Type 316 stainless steel and glass sculpture, which sits on Community Day School’s grounds, is at once understated and unavoidable.

Visualizing six million

Over a four-year period, Walter’s classroom filled with glass aquariums brimming with tabs so heavy that the floors of the nearly 100-year-old building heaved under the weight. Already accomplishing what seemed impossible, the students were confronted with just what to do with 1,179 kilograms of tabs. At the time, the school was hosting artist Elena Hiatt Houlihan, who often works with schools and community organizations. A collaboration began between the students and Hiatt Houlihan, who shared her expertise in fashioning public art from recyclable materials. A design proposal from three 6th grade girls won out. Their simplistic vision would eventually become an internationally renowned landmark and one of the largest and most complex pieces of public artwork designed by young people worldwide.

Displaying the tabs presented another issue. Imbedding the tabs in concrete or placing them in hollow acrylic walls were considered and found to be unsuitable. Inspired by a child’s glass coin bank, a local glass company was asked to fashion square glass blocks with a slot in the top that would be ideal for storing the tabs. Teams of students



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➤ Community Day School students are trained to conduct tours of the sculpture for visiting groups.

working under the artist's guidance first created a clay mockup of the sculpture, then transformed it using plexiglass for the walls and crumpled aluminum foil to signify the tabs' appearance. After receiving the local government's approval, an architectural firm suggested modifications and developed the schematic design and contract documents, moving the project closer to the build phase.

Embracing the weight

The memorial consists of 960 individual glass blocks, each filled with 6,250 tabs painstakingly counted and inserted into the glass blocks by the students. Each block weighs approximately 9.1 kilograms. They are stacked on a concrete base to form walls standing at varying dimensions between 2.1 meters and 2.7 meters in height.

To stabilize the nearly nine tonnes of glass block, a strong backbone was essential. The architect and fabricators chose Type 316L stainless steel for its strength and its ability to resist the local environment's corrosion challenges. Pittsburgh heavily uses deicing salts, famous for staining and degrading outdoor metal. The memorial faces a moderately-busy intersection at the edge of the school grounds, so over time deicing salts accumulate on its lightly textured surface. However, the 2% molybdenum in Type 316L stainless steel help resist corrosion from this buildup of chlorides. Indeed, the stainless steel remains flawless and stain-free after eight years in service.

Keeping Tabs appears to come to life as the changing light patterns strike the tab-filled glass blocks throughout the day. At night, the use of ornamental lighting provides another perspective. The sculpture is open for guided and self-guided tours. Visitors to the site can absorb its meaning by viewing the exterior or entering the chapel-like meditative space at its center. Its shimmering stainless steel draws the attention of passersby, beckoning them to "keep tabs on our humanity" and be prepared to confront prejudice and injustice while making the world a better place. (Robert Bukk)

➤ *Keeping Tabs* uses a No-4 surface finish for a uniform look that detracts from fingerprints left by visitors.



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