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Newsvine



Kids inspire Holocaust survivor

By Joel Jacobson BRIGHT SPOT | 5:20 AM

JOSEPH TENEBBAUM'S voice cracks.

He's told his story many times before, but the emotion tonight is overwhelming as he relates how he was taken from his Polish home as a seven-year-old and forced into Nazi concentration camps, and then survived to come to New York and Toronto to build a new life.

The Toronto resident is in Sydney on this night to speak to a group of Grade 6 students from Brookland Elementary School, kids he's quickly grown to admire for their courage in keeping his story alive, and that of millions of others less fortunate than him, millions slaughtered during the Holocaust.

The students have learned about the Holocaust from their teacher, Kevin Linden, who, with two other Cape Breton teachers, spent three weeks in Israel last summer, much of it at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem.

The children composed poems about the Holocaust, expressing their feelings with the passion of the written word. Kevin, with assistance from students of art teacher Diane Lewis of Memorial Consolidated High in North Sydney, compiled the poetry into a 180-page glossy book.

In the camp there is no hope.

There is only suffering.

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There is no light at the end of the tunnel.

Then one day, Russian soldiers appeared on the horizon.

That was the light at the end of the tunnel.

The beam or glimmer they said would never come

Hope comes finally.

Grade 6 student John Angus MacNeil penned those words. "Learning about the Holocaust is very important to me. I think everyone should learn about it. It teaches people that it is not right to discriminate against other cultures and races," the 12-year-old says.

Joseph, 80, tells the students, their parents, friends and members of Cape Breton's Jewish community that he flew to Sydney at his own expense because of what these youngsters have done to protect the memory of those who died in the Holocaust, so the world will never forget and, maybe, learn from it.

"When I was stripped of my home, my town, my family and my life, I couldn't imagine I'd be here, 70 years later, to describe to you what happened," he says to the hushed audience. "I have survived so I could speak because the silent were killed."

He describes, in vivid detail, what "life" was like in the concentration camps, how he saw death every day and night, yet never lost faith that the torturous journey would end.

When he attained a new life in North America, Joseph said he decided to write about his experiences.

"I wanted to write a short letter to my children, to describe to them what happened. Words turned into pages, then to chapters as memories kept coming back. I wrote 1,200 pages, more than a long letter," he smiles.

He eventually turned his writings into a book, *Legacy and Redemption: A Life Renewed*, since published by the American Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

"The Nazis destroyed many people, each precious and unique," he says. "Each survivor is precious and unique, and it's up to me to tell my story. That's the only way the dead could come back to life."

Many adults wipe away tears. The children listen, in awe of Joseph's courage to survive and to talk about the Holocaust.

Joseph is asked later what he would say to (Nazi leader) Adolf Hitler today.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

"Our lives improve only when we take chances -- and the first and most difficult risk we can take is to be honest with ourselves. "

Walter Anderson

"I would give my life if he could be alive to see what's going on, that he did not succeed (in his plan to exterminate all Jews and non-Aryans)," he says.

Student Will Brien thanks Joseph on behalf of the assembly.

"We spent a lot of time learning about the Holocaust and putting our thoughts into words," he says. "But there is no replacement for the words and thoughts of someone who has experienced this firsthand.

"This project has taught us about hatred and racism and to show respect for each other. Without these lessons, terrible things can continue to happen in our school, city, country and the world."

Kevin listens proudly, realizing the impact his teachings have had.

"Tonight's book launch is overwhelming," he says. "There has been a force out there pushing for the publication of these poems."

The book and the teachers' educational visit to Israel were supported by Cape Breton's Jewish community, the Atlantic Jewish Council, Cape Breton-Victoria regional school board, Nova Scotia Teachers Union and many private donors.

Brianna Stubbert's poem expresses the feelings of so many who listened to Joseph and thanked Kevin for his teachings.

I lost my home

I lost my friends

I lost my family

I lost everything I could ever have

I say to myself, why us?

Jews, why us?

Why do we Jews have to be treated like this?

It all happened too fast.

If only the world would have noticed and spoke up?

If only!!

Joseph's eyes mist with memory, and with affection for these Sydney kids who have learned so much and are willing to speak out.

Bright Spot appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Be sure to read Great Kids in The Sunday Herald. Contact Joel Jacobson by e-mail at jjacobson@herald.ca, phone at 426-2811, ext. 2222, or fax at 426-1158.

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