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Cape Breton students write poetry about Shoah

By **JOEL JACOBSON**
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HALIFAX — Alaura Moore, a Grade 6 student at Brookland Elementary School in Sydney, N.S., read the following words, which she wrote herself, before an overflow crowd of more than 125 students, parents, educators and members of the Cape Breton Jewish community.

“I can run from my fears/ I can run from my tears/ Yes, it is true that I run very fast/ But it is also true that I am a Jew/ And there is no running from the Holocaust.”

Listening intently to the poem with tears in his eyes and pride in his heart was Joseph Tenenbaum of Toronto, a Holocaust survivor.

He was hearing young people, none of them Jewish, read poetry they composed after studying the Holocaust over the last few months with teacher Kevin Linden.



Toronto businessman and Holocaust survivor Joseph Tenenbaum hugs Brianna Stubbert, a Grade 6 student at Brookland Elementary School in Sydney, N.S., after he spoke to her class and their families.

Tenenbaum, now a successful businessman, flew to Sydney at his own expense to speak to these students, to further their understanding of the Holocaust and what it did to him, what it

meant to him, and even how it turned him into a man who can forgive.

“Even though I was stripped of my home, my family, my town, my name, of my belongings, and left naked to be no longer human, just a number, like an item in an auction that no one wanted to bid on, the Nazis couldn’t strip me of my dignity,” he said, his voice cracking as many members of the audience wiped tears from their eyes.

“What you have done [in studying the Holocaust and writing poetry about it] is indescribable and very magnanimous,” he told the children.

With support from the Jewish Community of Cape Breton, the Atlantic Jewish Council, the Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board, and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, three teachers – Linden, Diane Lewis and Lynn Crawford – attended a three-week seminar at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem last summer. They were instilled with the enthusiasm to teach Holocaust education to their students, to keep the story alive as the number of survivors, and the Jewish population of Cape Breton, continues to dwindle.

Linden canvassed for money (which was willingly given by the community) to publish the poetry that he urged his students to write. Lewis, an art teacher at Memorial Composite High School in Sydney Mines, N.S., encouraged her students to use their work as illustrations in the book.

The result is a 180-page volume titled *The Future Is In Our Hands*, consisting of poems, the history of the Cape Breton Jewish community, and comments by parents on the positive effect the project has had on their children. It will be distributed to schools, libraries and all Grade 6 teachers in Cape Breton, Linden said.

Herman Nathanson, who financially supported the publication, praised Linden for his work with the children.

“He has a good heart. The children are his interest. He has such a good rapport with them that he can reach them and continue this message of hope.”

Alaura Moore, like many of her 28 classmates, has more than one poem in the book. Some wrote up to five.

“I learned a lot during our classes but today, hearing Mr. Tenenbaum, I learned so much more,” she said. “It truly makes a difference hearing from someone who was there rather than reading books. I think everyone today should be talking about the Holocaust and remembering, because of what’s happening now [with genocides] throughout the world.”

Parent Don Brien, whose son Will recited passionate words of thanks to Tenenbaum for telling the students his story, said a Holocaust memorial program that the kids presented in school “brought out the humanistic side. I learned a lot, too, from this project. I had never listened to a survivor tell his story before. It had an impact on me and the other parents, as well as the children, to hear his words.”

Evy Druker, chair of Cape Breton’s Holocaust Education committee, which includes Jewish and non-Jewish members, praised the event.

“We started eight years ago by bringing in Holocaust speakers for Yom Hashoah,” she said. “Now we have teachers and [non-Jewish] clergy on our committee. The seminar the teachers attended [in Israel] was for them to learn to teach other teachers. The response has been unbelievable.”

Lewis stressed the program’s significance.

“It’s important for me as an educator to teach about [the Holocaust], to carry it on. There are so many young teachers coming into the system who don’t know. It’s important that we, as teachers, educate them so they can teach the children. There are lessons still not learned.”

Copies of *The Future Is In Our Hands* are available through City Printers in Sydney, N.S., 902-564-8245 or csr@cityprinters.com

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