



Students Christina Enright (left) and Tanvir Minhas from Westmount Charter School in Calgary greet Isaac Gotfried (right) after his speech at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights Tuesday. The students were part of a group from the Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies program, which visited the CMHR for the first time after travelling to Washington, D.C. for years.



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Holocaust survivor's tale grips students

Silence in the face of cruelty means 'you are a part of that'

By Kristin Annable

WHEN Isaac Gotfried was 15 years old, he was taken from the Polish factory where he worked and placed in a slave labour camp by the Nazis. He spent almost four years being shipped or marched to concentration camps throughout Germany, surrounded by death, starvation and violence as a Jewish teen during the Holocaust.

Seventy-one years after he was liberated by French troops, Gotfried, 90, told his life story to a group of students at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR). His purpose was to teach them to speak out when they see people being mistreated.

"To be more vigilant with what is going on with the world and to not overlook it, not to keep quiet about it, to speak up, to tell the world what they know," Gotfried said when asked what he wants students to take away from his speech.

About 60 students from across the country gathered at the CMHR Tuesday to hear Gotfried speak as part of the Asper Foundation Human Rights and Holocaust Studies program. It is the first time the program sent its students to Winnipeg, after 18 years of sending students to Washington, D.C. as part of the program. The late Izzy Asper's dream of the CMHR was partially shaped by his desire to give students a Canadian home to learn about human rights.

The trip also included a guest speaker on the violence in Sierra Leone as well two days extensively touring the \$351-million museum.

Christina Enright, 13, from Westmount Charter School in Calgary, said she dreams of studying international law. Christina said listening to Gotfried's life story, which included losing his parents, three sisters and more than 100 relatives during the Holocaust, taught her it is a crime to be nothing but a bystander.

"You are essentially choosing somebody else's fate; the victims, they can't speak up for themselves, they don't have the power to do it," Christina said.

"If you stand by and let that happen, you are part of that — you are sentencing them to their fate," she said after Gotfried's speech.

Jacob Kime from the London Jewish Community Centre in London, Ont., said he was particularly affected when listening to Gotfried talk about how he was haunted for years by memories of a German shepherd dog that sniffed him out while he was hiding from the Nazis.

"I've heard a lot about the Holocaust so far, but it was really inspiring to hear a new story," Jacob said. "Whenever you hear a story there is always unique things, like the German shepherds. He kept talking about them and how scary they were. A lot of the details of what the Nazis did when people got caught, I didn't know much about that."

Gotfried didn't mince words as he told the students of waking up sandwiched between two corpses at a concentration camp in Germany, or spending three days without food, water or a toilet on a train as they travelled by rail to the Buchenwald concentration camp. Gotfried survived the death march out of Buchenwald near the end of the war by escaping and being discovered by French troops. He settled in Winnipeg in 1947 with his brother, his only surviving family member.

Gotfried has spoken to more than 20,000 people in the past 23 years, and said he is frequently asked how many classmates or friends of his survived the Holocaust.

"I'll tell you how many, zero. None of my friends that I went to school with survived the war. None of those boys that I associated with or played with, my neighbours. Zero," Gotfried said.

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— Holocaust survivor Isaac Gotfried's message to students at the CMHR

kristin.annable@freepress.mb.ca