

Holocaust survivor's message to Willow Dale fifth-graders: 'Do not hate'

By Gary Weckselblatt Staff Writer | Posted: Monday, June 15, 2015 4:45 am

On the run from Nazis from the age of 8 to 13, the childhood of Daniel Goldsmith was far different than the lifestyle of today's fifth-graders.

And his goal is to keep it that way.

"You are the last generation to see a live Holocaust survivor," Goldsmith recently told 175 Willow Dale Elementary School students. "I'm 83, and I am one of the young ones. It's important we never forget what happened."

Goldsmith, who was separated from his family during World War II when the Nazis exterminated 6 million Jews, told the youngsters he doesn't believe the world has learned its lesson. He cited the mass slaughter of innocents in Africa and the Middle East, and called on them to "act against evil, prejudice, intolerance, anti-Semitism and hatred."

"Please, please, please do not hate," he said. "You do yourself a disservice by hating anybody. Be decent to everybody. I'm asking you to become righteous human beings who refuse to be indifferent when you see something wrong. Do not be silent. Do not turn your back."

The youngsters listened intently for 90 minutes to Goldsmith's nightmare, and he patiently answered their questions afterward. His presentation, which included family photos and those of church leaders who hid him from the Nazis, is part of the Centennial School District's character program that teaches tolerance and helps to prevent bullying.

The students read books like "Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl," and "Number the Stars," as preparation for Goldsmith's story.

Willow Dale teacher Susan Starr, who works with fifth-grade teachers on a variety of projects, helped



Holocaust survivor Daniel Goldsmith speaks to 5th graders at Willow Dale Elementary School in Warminster on Monday, June 8, 2015. The students read "Number the Stars" and the "Diary of Ann Frank" in preparation for Goldsmith's visit. Goldsmith is seen here talking questions after his presentation.

bring Goldsmith's message to the school. "He gave them different experiences from what they have in their lives," she said. "We hope they reflect back and take something from it. The idea is to not be hateful to anybody."

Without hate, the Belgium-born Goldsmith said, there would not have been a Holocaust.

Unfortunately, that hate cost him his father and forced him, his mother and sister to separate to avoid death.

In 1942, the Germans ordered Goldsmith's father to a work camp in northern France. At the rail station in Antwerp, Belgium, his dad's last words to his son were, "You're the little man of the family now. Take care of your mother and sister."

"I told him I would," Goldsmith said. He was 10, and never again saw his father who was killed in Auschwitz. "That's really the day I lost my childhood."

The loss of his dad hurt deeply, as his number-one goal was "to be reunited with my family. ... I was very attached to my dad. We would never be whole again."

Goldsmith told students that after his father left, his street was raided by Nazis at night. Jewish neighbors were pulled from their houses and thrown into trucks by men with guns and dogs.

He, his mother and sister escaped to the roof of their house. Once the Germans left, his mother sought help from nuns at a nearby convent. For the duration of the war, Catholic priests protected him. They gave him false papers, placed him in orphanages and moved him around.

Then the Nazis raided one of the orphanages, and Goldsmith was herded with about 20 other Jewish boys onto a railroad cattle car, from which he and the others made a daring escape. A 16-year-old boy named Joseph, who became their leader, carved a hole in the train and pushed the boys out as the train slowed around a sharp curve.

"We were bleeding with cuts and sprains," he said, "but there were no major injuries."

After a few days with no food or water, Joseph bravely went into a village and spoke to a priest, who placed the boys with families.

Goldsmith hid in a Catholic family's attic for more than a year.

The persistence of his mother, who joined the Belgium underground and lost a leg during the war, helped the family, minus dad, reunite. The three made it to America after the war and lived with different relatives in New York. Today, Goldsmith resides in Hatboro and his sister lives in Warminster. They see each other often.

"Try to connect with me," Goldsmith said to the students as he spoke.

"A lot of the things that happened to me was when I was your age and younger."