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STEVENSON NEWS

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS VISIT STEVENSON: This week's print edition of the Lincolnshire Review will include an article about last week's visit with Stevenson students by two Holocaust survivors. Aaron Elster and Ruth Saffro talked to some 150 students about their experiences on Thursday. Students also had the opportunity to see pieces from the Spungen Holocaust Postal Collection, which includes stamps, postcards, letters, bank note forgeries, and manuscripts from concentration camps and Jewish ghettos. The collection was purchased for the Spungen Foundation by SHS parent Danny Spungen. You can read the article online at:

http://www.pioneerlocal.com/lincolnshire/news/1603755,lincolnshire-holocaust-060209-s1_article

Aaron Elster bio:

<http://www.aaronelster.com/bio.html>

Spungen Foundation website:

<http://www.spungenfoundation.org/>

Link to video about Spungen exhibit:

http://www.spungenfoundation.org/documents/news/video/video_cbs_news.html

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Holocaust survivor reflects on childhood in hiding

(<http://www.pioneerlocal.com/lincolnshire/news/1603755.lincolnshire-holocaust-060209-s1.article>)

June 2, 2009

By [RONNIE WACHTER](#) rwachter@pioneerlocal.com

The numbers zero and 6 million mean more to Aaron Elster than they do to most people.

Elster measures both by the pain they cause him: The hollowness of hearing for years that he was nothing, and the horror of knowing that all the agony he carried with him about his sister's murder had to be multiplied by 6 million to calculate the Holocaust.

Elster was 10 on Yom Kippur in 1942, the day the Germans forced the Jews in his Polish hometown into their death camps. He and one of his two sisters escaped, though that led him into years of a degrading existence while he waited for either freedom or death.

"If you talk about numbers, 11 million, 6 million, 1.5 million, they lose their meaning," Elster told about 150 Stevenson High School students May 28. "Think about someone you love, that you cannot imagine living without. One person, dying 6 million times -- then the Holocaust and the pain has some meaning to you."

Elster's speech was the first of a three-part Holocaust education program at Stevenson; the other two parts were a second speaker, Lincolnwood resident Ruth Saffro, and exhibit-keeper Danny Spungen. Spungen spoke of how he almost accidentally found himself purchasing a collection of materials from the Holocaust: letters, currency and bank paperwork forged by Jews hoping to hide their affairs from the Nazis.

Students had the chance to pick up and examine all the pieces of Spungen's collection with their hands, a rare opportunity to handle delicate pieces of history personally. Spungen said after his presentation that he believed the most important piece of history at Stevenson that day was Elster, and his story.

Life in woods, attic

Elster detailed his months of living in the woods outside his Nazi-occupied hometown, surviving a winter in the open while wearing the shorts he happened to have on the day Hitler's men kicked in his home's door. He then spoke about the two years he spent in the attic of the family who took him in.

The family was so afraid that the Nazis would discover their boarder that they never let him leave the attic; he went two years without a haircut, but he got so little food that the hair on top of his 50-pound body rarely grew. He talked about the freezing winter, the summer's hot air getting trapped in the room he could not leave, dealing with the boredom and struggling to maintain a belief in a benevolent God and humanity.

"My ambition when I was 15 was to live long enough to join the Air Force and bomb Germany out of existence," Elster said. "Hate was destroying me."

But no longer, he told his audience.

"Germany's become an ally and a good friend to Israel and the Jewish people," he said. "It's probably the only country that really owned up to what happened."

Elster urged the Stevenson Patriots before him to refuse the weakness of hatred, no matter what they may be subjected to in their futures.

"It's important for people like myself, while we still can, to speak," he said. "The truth is that my hope is in you. I do this because I believe in you, young people."