

August 2017

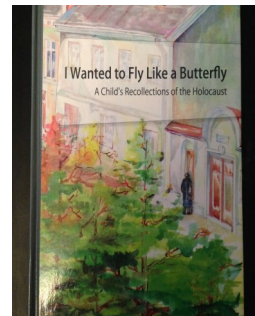
Congregation Kol Ami, Flower Mound, Texas
Holocaust Studies
Third Grade, 2016-2017
Mollie Marks, Judaica and Hebrew Morah

After attending a comprehensive seminar at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum in Israel, Kol Ami congregants Dr. Deborah Fripp and Violet Neff-Helms were awarded a grant from the Jewish Federation of Great Dallas Center for Jewish Education (CJE) to bring a new Holocaust narrative to Dallas area congregations. The aim of the new narrative is to tell the story of the Holocaust from the perspective of hope, survival, and the continuity of Jewish life: not from the perspective of what the Nazis did to us and their attempts to destroy us.

I have always taught beginning Hebrew. It's a pretty cut and dry subject. Here's a letter, here's a vowel, here's how to put them together, games to play, easy-peasy. There's no morality to it, no heavy discussions, nothing to scare the students.

Now that we have adopted the religious school curriculum of the *Institute of Southern Jewish Life*, I was called upon to teach Judaica as well. It was to include the teaching of the Holocaust. I feared for my three girls (a perfect class), what I might have to tell them, questions I might have to answer. It's such a horrible subject; surely too intense for 8-9 year olds.

The book chosen for the third grade level is *I Wanted to Fly Like a Butterfly*. Written about Hanna Gofrit, it tells of her experience as a young Polish girl during World War II. It is a touching account of her happy family before the war, hiding during the war, the kind people that helped her family, and the sadness from losses. She and her mother survived. They lived. Hanna still lives (she's 82) and makes her home in Tel Aviv.



I started the book in March right around Purim. Esther's scroll gave me the idea for the girls to illustrate the book and put it in megillah form. It would help cement the story in their minds and provide a group activity. The single scroll was easy to make from a dowel and two wooden discs from the craft store.

I read one or two short sections at a time. They would illustrate what we read on a large sheet of butcher paper using craft supplies like markers, foam cutouts, stickers, and pompoms.



Yellow stars on coats.



Burning synagogue.

Men in tallit praying.

Hiding in the pig-pen.
Fighting men in the woods.
Wishing to be a butterfly.



Finding a new home in Israel.

Each week a new panel would be hung on the wall in the classroom. By the time we finished the book, the panels reached all the way around the classroom. We taped all the panels together with decorative tape and attached them to the scroll. To take pictures, we took it into the sanctuary where it just about stretched from one side to the other. It was beautiful! The girls were so proud of what they created.



Another highlight of doing this project was being asked by Dr. Fripp to display the megillah at our congregation Yom HaShoah Seder. The reaction to my class's efforts was heartwarming. Everyone was touched by the megillah and impressed with how the Holocaust is being taught to the even the very young.

The time spent with my class on this project provided quality time for reflection, questions, and discussion. We talked about our Jewish identity, bullying, judging people, hatred, kindness, bravery, and self worth. We role played the story and talked about how Hannah might have felt. I had three girls: one very aware of the world, one living a typical 8 year old life, and one with a pure and simple outlook. Even with this diversity, Hannah's story resonated with all of them. They learned, they experienced, and they grew.

And me? I learned, experienced and grew, too. I learned not to be afraid to push myself outside my comfort zone. I saw young girls strengthen their Jewish identity and develop compassion for others. I grew in my purpose to ensure the continuity of Jewish life. I am a better Jew and teacher. I expect I will become even better as I teach the Holocaust over the coming years.

So is the Holocaust too intense for an 8 year old? No, not when it's taught with the new narrative developed by Yad Vashem and adapted by Dr. Deborah Fripp and Violet Neff-Helms. As Dr. Fripp says, "We give the people back their faces and their names, and we see a different story than the one we are used to. We see a story of people who held onto their humanity and their Judaism in the face of chaos and terror. We see individual stories of strength and courage, even if many of them end in tragedy. We see and acknowledge the horror we endured but recognize the strength with which we met that horror."