

Holocaust Survivor Visit: Eva Hamilton

In our FBI lessons we have been studying the Holocaust. This refers to the time in history when the Nazis tried to destroy the Jewish population. They killed approximately six million Jewish people as well as other 'undesirable' groups, such as Romani (gypsies), political prisoners and homosexuals. We were privileged to have a visitor to our Year 11 class to talk about her experience.

Minus 60 degree Fahrenheit temperatures, being separated from family and living in a hut were just some of the things that Eva Hamilton, a survivor of the Holocaust, experienced whilst living in a camp in Siberia. Throughout Eva's childhood she was very wealthy, she had things that many other people wouldn't have had: a nurse, a nanny, people to help around the house, a villa and a large house. However, aged only 10, everything changed for Eva. Eva and her mother were taken by Russian soldiers and travelled for weeks in a train before reaching a sub-zero temperature camp in Siberia where they spent 2 years. Her sister, who was slightly older, escaped to France and for a time was very happy. She was a bright student who received prizes for her work. Eva told us that her sister should have gone into hiding but wanted to collect a school prize. That day, she was rounded up and sent to a concentration camp. At the end of the war Eva found out that her sister had sadly perished in Auschwitz. She hung a shoe on the school memorial tree in memory of her sister.

Meeting a Holocaust survivor was so much better than reading from a text book because it made it more personal as we got to listen to Eva's story instead of reading facts and figures. It made me realise that we often just see the people in the Holocaust as numbers, whereas each of them are individual people who have their own lives, families and dreams. No-one is just a figure. No-one is just a statistic. Everyone is different.

The thing that struck me the most about Eva was that she down-played her suffering: despite the fact that it would have been awful going from a wealthy life to living in a hut, she said that, 'It wasn't that bad'. Furthermore, she didn't let her experiences affect the rest of her life; she didn't seem to dwell on the negative things such as the loss of her sister but focused on the positive things such as her mum and her being reunited with her dad. Eva turned her negative experiences into a positive outcome because since then she has been a Samaritan for 50 years and recently has talked about the refugee crisis.

In my opinion, it is important to talk to survivors because not many people get the chance to know a real life story about how people survived. The Holocaust happened over 70 years ago and as a result, lots of the survivors are getting elderly and their memories can become confused, therefore it is important to hear their stories before they are forgotten.

The most important lesson that we should learn from the Holocaust is that everyone is equal. Everyone is a human being, no matter what religion, race or sexuality and deserves to be treated like one. I am a human being, you are a human being and each and every one of those innocent people who died in the Holocaust were human beings. I believe that people should always remember the Holocaust so that history doesn't repeat itself and we never see anything like it again.

Eva's visit really made me think about just how easily everything can change and your world can be turned upside down. In just an instant, everything can be different. I now realise that you should cherish everything in your life; you never know when it could change for the better or for the worse. I wish now that I had asked Eva what she missed most whilst she was in the camp and what it was that got her through it because that is not just something that you can read from a history book.

That is only something you can ask a survivor.

Emma Nicholls.