

A dream come true

By Evelyn Howard
Special to The Suburban

Evelyn Howard is a teacher at Thorndale Elementary School in Pierrefonds. She was one of three teachers from Quebec who won the Riva and Thomas Hecht Foundation Scholarship given to elementary or high school teachers who exhibit an interest in teaching students about the Holocaust. This summer, she made her first ever trip to Israel.

It was summer 1967 and a group of my friends were going to live on a Kibbutz in Israel. I begged my parents to let me go but nothing would convince them. They had lived through the Holocaust and were overly protective of their children.

So that summer I enjoyed Expo '67, but when my friends returned, I realized that our relationships had changed. I had missed an integral part of their life experience that would change the path of their life — and mine.

Fast forward to the spring of 2007 and how my dream finally came true.

In March, my son Eric phoned to tell me that the Riva and Thomas Hecht Foundation was sponsoring three teachers from Quebec public schools to go to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to study the Holocaust and to learn how to teach it in their schools. It sounded exciting but I laughed and said "Eric you know I don't fly."

A week later, when I saw the notice up in my staff room, I knew I should go for it. I told no one in my family and decided not to worry about anything until later.

To apply I wrote a letter of intent. The foundation wanted to know what I would do. The recipient of the scholarship would be teaching the next generation about the Holocaust. My

Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Gandhi, to name a few.

Non-violent negotiation, perseverance, empowerment and education were the life skills I wanted to impart to my students. To be given the opportunity to learn more methods to convey these messages was all the better.

I also wanted to reach more people and planned to do this by writing articles, giving seminars to student teachers, other educators, and the general public.

To my astonishment I was accepted but my thrill was bittersweet because to get to Israel, I had to fly. When my husband found out about the scholarship, the first thing he said was: "Should you accept, you cannot change your mind at the airport."

Well, I accepted and worked on my fear by thinking mind over matter and of how much I stood to lose by not conquering these fears.

To my delight, my husband, a retired history teacher, joined me on my journey.

My parents were Holocaust survivors. "Were," because they came to Canada and put that experience past them in order to forge a new life and start a new family.

Many survivors, like my parents, did not tell their children of their horrendous experiences until the arrival of their grandchildren. The survivors are getting old and many are gone and it is important to give homage to those who died during the war and to those who survived.

The night before the trip I wrote in my journal "it is the evening before tomorrow. Tomorrow is the beginning of my journey to explore the events my parents lived through."

"I will also be confronting my demons — the fear of flying and the realities my parents lived through."



The Riva and Thomas Hecht Foundation Scholarships were given out this summer. From left: Marcus Tabachnick, Chairman of the LBPSB, Thomas and Riva Hecht, Adrienne Sholzberg (recipient), Robert T. Mills, Director General of the LBPSB, Evelyn Howard (recipient).

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It seems that there are many in the world who have not heard this message, and still many parts of the world where people witness murder, hatred, and the loss of family and shelter on a daily basis. Think of Darfur for instance. As long as one person remains threatened we all are. We were brought into this world to co-exist and help each other and to achieve this we must celebrate diversity and not shun it.

On June 28, we flew from Toronto to Tel Aviv and then took a bus to Jerusalem. The first weekend was spent finding our bearings and exploring our surroundings.

On July 1, we met the directors and fel-

low students in the program and I was thrilled that there was a diverse group taking the course. There were historians, museum administrators and children of Holocaust survivors. There were teachers from Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Serbia, the U.S. and Canada, which I'm proud to say, sent the largest contingent.

Not all were scholarship participants and three quarters were not Jewish, but everyone came with the same resolve — to relate the horror of the Holocaust and to learn from the past to help bring peace to the future.

The next morning we were taken to Yad Vashem (the Holocaust Centre) to begin

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