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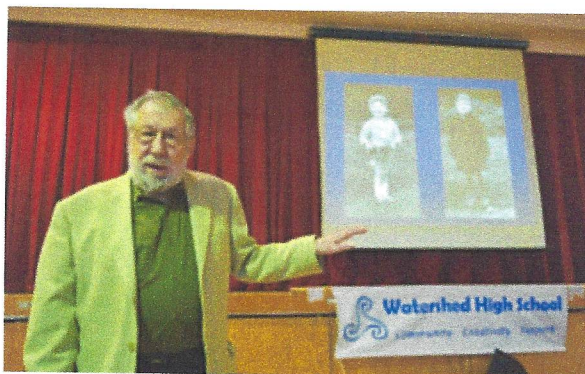
'Genocide begins with separation'

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By [cbonelli](#)

Holocaust survivor speaks to Watershed students

By Cam Bonelli

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Holocaust survivor and Minnesota resident Fred Amram show a picture of himself at 5 years old before his family escaped from Hanover, Germany. Amram spoke to Watershed High School students about the Holocaust and the bystander effect on Sept. 28.

Every night after Germany invaded Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, 6-year-old Fred Amram and his family would hear the air-raid siren and run to the community underground bunker.

In the dark surrounded by strangers, Amram would cling to his mother while his father comforted her as the bombs rained on Hanover, Germany. One day a sign appeared over the bunker, stating, "Juden Verboten" meaning "Jews forbidden." Now, Amram had to watch the bombs drop from his fourth-story apartment window.

"My mother, father and I got to see the bombs – the buildings burning – every night from our fourth-floor apartment," Amram said. "One day my mother cracked. She opened the door to balcony and said, 'God I hope the bombs fall on this building, I don't care if the bomb takes my family, but if they can't live with the Jews, let them die with the Jews.'"

Amram said people talk about death, concentration, camps, genocide but asked students how do we get to all of the horror.

"It doesn't just happen overnight," he said.

On Sept. 28, Watershed High School invited Amram – a Holocaust survivor and former University of Minnesota professor – to speak to students, staff and parents about surviving the Holocaust and the bystander effect's role in genocide.

Amram was born in 1933, the year Germany elected Hitler as chancellor. The government forbid Jewish women to give birth in public hospitals in Hanover, so Amram's birth certificate was signed by a nun and a mother superior. He said all of the horrors of the Holocaust were already set in motion, such as the passing of the Nuremberg Laws in 1935.

"Jews could no longer be citizens," Amram said. "I lost my citizenship at 2 and a half years old. Jews lost all civil rights. Genocides begin with separation. It's them versus us."

Amram said bit by bit, the world for Jews in Germany got worse, especially on Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass. "On Nov. 9, 1938, with permission of the German police, Jewish-owned stores were looted, and 1,000 synagogues were burned in Austria and Germany," he said. "I could see the synagogues burned and the buildings crumble and give way to flames. Seven thousand Jewish-owned businesses were burned and looted. Jews were hauled out of their homes and beaten. They were made to scrub the streets the next day."

Amram asked students what they saw in a photo he had projected showing Jews scrubbing the street. Students pointed out that citizens were holding hands behind those scrubbing the streets.

"Those people holding hands – those are bystanders letting this happen," Amram said. "Imagine if all the people of Germany said they wouldn't go along with this. We have to be upstanders. We have to stand up, but that takes some risk."

Amram said most believe Kristallnacht marked the beginning of the Holocaust, but he would not accept that date.

After Kristallnacht, the Gestapo came to the homes of Jews to search for items.

"Then the Gestapo came to our apartment and said, 'We're looking for radios. Where do you have your radios,'" Amram said. "Jews were no longer allowed to have radios. My mother said we only have the one in the living room, but they searched the entire house and through closets. They left with the one in the living room."

Amram's family decided to escape Germany after Jewish men were taken for slave labor.

"I never found out the details of [how we escaped] that first night, and to this day I still don't know," Amram said. "That first night they left, crossed the border into Holland – which is

contiguous with Germany – and somehow got to Amsterdam before Holland got invaded. We were able to go further.”

Amram arrived in New York City at the age of 6, unable to speak English and a refugee in a new country.

“I call myself a refugee rather than an immigrant because immigrants choose to come to a new country to have a better life,” Amram said. “There are a thousand more stories on how I had to learn English, and people picked on me for being Jewish and German. I was now the bad guy twice. America was at war with Germany, and there was a lot of anti-Semitism in the United States at that time.”

Amram published a memoir, “We’re in America Now: A Survivor’s Stories” in 2016, which details his experiences in Hanover, his escape from Germany and living in America as a refugee.

For more information on Amram, visit his website fredamram.com.

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