**DAVID SHENTOW MEMORIAL**

**JUNE 21, 2017**

**In 2001, I began a small grass roots project with the idea of helping the students of Charles H. Hulse Public School learn about some key character education concepts (tolerance, acceptance, citizenship, and empathy). Since that time, I have been extremely fortunate to have received a few honours here and there along the way. A number of years ago the Jewish Federation of Ottawa, kindly bestowed upon me the Arie Van Mansum Award, which included a scholarship that allowed me to study at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem for a summer. I have also had the opportunity to meet our Prime Minister, on a number of occasions, as well as, opportunities to meet a number of prominent politicians. Yet, this evening, being asked by the Shentow family to speak about David, is probably the most significant honour I have ever received.**

**David passed away on Monday, June 12th. I had the good fortune to see him while I was in Toronto on Saturday, June 10th. Although his body was failing, he was as humble as always. He asked about my wife, my health, and my students. Typical of David, he never wanted to be the point of conversation – it was never about him - always about you.**

**I first met David after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in New York City. During the time of the attacks, we had high school students next door to our school cheering and honking car horns. We began to see a rise in anti-Semitic graffiti and vandalism at our school, and pictures in books of the Israeli flag were now being defaced. I explained to David my idea of developing a program for my Grade 6 students that would help combat the various behaviours I was seeing. He was bothered by what I was telling him and felt a need to help. But there was a catch, he didn’t like speaking to children so young. He had done it once, and it had not gone well. Also he had never spoken to a predominantly Muslim audience before. I was able to convince him that this was exactly the audience that needed to hear what he had to say. Finally, he said, “You talk to Rose and we can set something up”.**

**What David, was really saying was run it through my management team and if she agrees then we’ll talk. I use the term, management team, to describe Rose because it often felt like I was dealing with more than one person. We had long conversations on the phone – Rose would quiz me, then leave me with a list of suggested books I should read. I would check my email to find scanned historical documents and more suggested readings. My answering machine had messages with recommendations identifying specific movies and documentaries I needed to view – a.s.a.p. This couldn’t be the work of one person. Rose was making sure I had done my homework and wasn’t wasting her husband’s time. She was protecting David, something I have seen her do often over the years.**

**Finally, after winning over David’s management team a date was set for his visit. He arrived with Rose by his side and with the support of his friend Rubin Friedman. Within one afternoon, David had developed a foundation for an ongoing program that would forever change the culture of our school. David spoke with sincerity and honesty as he always did, and was surprisingly somewhat taken aback by his audience. The students – many from war torn countries, many who were forced to leave their homes because of civil unrest, seemed to be able to relate to David’s story and were a completely invested audience.**

**David was the catalyst for change at our school. After that first visit, he promised to come back every year –“God willing” he would say. David made 12 annual visits to our school. He and Rose also came to our school during young author’s day. In this case, David played a different role – kids read to him and told him their stories. Most of our kids had never met a Jewish person in their life. So if you were to only meet one Jewish person in your life time – who better than David Shentow.**

**I know this might sound like the opening to a bad joke but it’s a true story – a very large professional football player, a teacher, and an older Jewish gentleman walked into a bar. Our conversation quickly became very philosophical. David often wondered how and why he survived when so many other innocent people perished. The football player, and the teacher, told him that maybe God simply had a different plan for him. Maybe his true destiny in life was to be a messenger. His message was heard by thousands. It was a message that opened eyes, touched hearts and even inspired action. It was also a message that he honestly hated giving. Every time he spoke of the tragic events of his youth he suffered nightmares. Yet, whenever asked to speak publicly he was always accommodating. Perhaps, it was David’s incredible strength of both character and will that made him such an effective messenger.**

**David, always proclaimed, that he was not a hero, that he was simply a witness to history. With all due respect there are many who would disagree with him. One would be my former student, Sophia Mirzayee. Sophia recently graduated with a degree in Human Rights, and earlier this year delivered a speech to a number of prominent politicians, including Prime Minister Trudeau. She spoke with great passion and eloquence about the importance of Holocaust education and its connection to teaching tolerance. She also said that meeting David Shentow and hearing his message had changed her life. In 2013, Sophia wrote an article for Carleton University’s Human Rights Journal in which she questioned how anyone could find a reason to try to dehumanize or abuse someone as gentle and caring as David. To her, it simply made no sense. Even at a young age, Sophia was able to judge David based on the content of his character. That he was older, and Jewish, was of little consequence. Sadly, not everyone is able to view the world with such optimism.**

**The Nazis tried numerous times to take David’s life. They failed. They tried to delete his identity by erasing his name and assigning him a number – 72585. We here this evening are proof, that that also failed. For those who knew David his number was nothing more than a scar from the past. It was part of him but it never defined him. Holocaust deniers have also tried to discredit his words. They’ve also failed. David Shentow’s message will live on. It will live on through countless teachers like myself, and through numerous students like Sophia Mirzayee. David will be remembered as a loving husband, a loving father, a respected member of his community, a teacher, and a living testament to the strength of the human spirit. I will always remember David as my friend.**

**Patrick Mascoe, Charles H. Hulse Public School**