

Irene Butter speaks at Or Shalom: Feb. 10, 2019

Irene Butter's gentle voice shared memories of her experience in the Holocaust, and it was hard to put her quiet voice along the more terrible aspects of her life story. A large crowd gathered to hear her speak and to learn that her son, Noah Butter, and his family, were members of Or Shalom. Her legacy of courage and testament gave everyone a lot to think about and to remember. At 88 years old or young, she spoke of the publication of her memoir, "Shores Beyond Shores: From Holocaust to Hope, My True Story." and was interviewed by the daughter of Holocaust survivors, Elizabeth Rynecki, who produced a 2014 documentary about Irene titled "Never a Bystander."

The theme of how important it is to never be a bystander emerged in her talk and in her advice given to a student who asked her what she has to say to young people in particular. Her message was to stand up for others when you see injustice, to not be bullied, to stop bullies when possible. As a teacher and educator in secular and Jewish education, I agree that her message is of utmost importance. Students learn about victims and about oppressor but in between the two is the bystander, the one who may wish no harm to anyone, but cannot allow the harm or injustice to prevail when they witness it. We all know how hard that is, but Irene's story, brought that message out loud and clear.

In her introduction to her memoir, she writes about the importance of telling her story, and it encapsulates the importance of hearing survivor stories that was encouraged by Elie Wiesel, one of the first Holocaust authors, who promoted the need to hear and tell these stories. In fact, Irene explains, that it was when she heard Wiesel speak, she realized, she, too, had to tell her story.

In her introduction, she writes: "When I got off the ship that brought me to the United States in 1945, the American relatives who took me in urged me to forget everything that had happened to my family-and to me- in the Holocaust. They told me to never think or speak of it again. I was fifteen years old and they were adults, so I listened to them. For forty years I was quiet. I was not truly free until I started to tell what happened to me as a child. Here is my story."

We are so lucky to have heard her speak. Irene also shared her memory of another important Holocaust heroine: Anne Frank. She met Anne Frank in Bergen

Belsen and along with another friend, threw clothes to her, since Anne had very little if no clothing in the winter. Sadly, Anne died a few days later.

Irene's voice may have been quiet but it was full of power and strength as is her memoir and her determination to share her story with others. If we can take "hope" from her in her memoir which came out of the Holocaust, we can pass that hope on to others as we share her story. We need her story now more than ever.

Nitza Agam