

Lessons from the Holocaust - Learning from Solly Irving



Solly Irving was a Jewish Holocaust survivor. He was born in Poland in 1930 and after liberation from Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1945, he came to England with the first group of children to be offered a home here. He was just fifteen years old. He settled, raised a family and lived in London until his death in October 2017.

In January each year, from 2001 to 2016, through the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity, Solly was invited to Plymouth, for a four day stay. During this time, he would usually visit three secondary schools and colleges each day, to share his painful testimony of those darkest of times. Despite advancing years and ill health, Solly felt that it was his solemn duty to speak to young people, about his experiences of war, separation, imprisonment and inhumanity. He was the only member of his large family to survive the Holocaust.

Solly created a unique relationship with Plymouth school pupils and their teachers. His talks were powerful and deeply moving. Audiences, often over two hundred, were silent as young people struggled to comprehend how such things could happen to a child, the same age as them, in the heart of Europe amongst so-called civilised and educated people. Solly would say that he didn't know how or why he survived, only that it was his destiny.

During his talks, Solly would often ask his young audiences to be his witnesses; to never forget and to strive to build a better world.

“When you go out into the world try to be friends with people, especially those who appear to be different; talk to them and respect them, even though their beliefs may be different. After all, we are all part of the same human family, aren't we? Try to create a better world than the one I had to endure.”

There was always time, though never enough, for pupils to ask their questions! Solly was eager to engage with young people and to ensure that lessons were learnt and ways found to build a better world. It is estimated that during this sixteen-year period, Solly shared his testimony with over 30,000 Plymouth students!

Accompanying Solly on these visits was Jonathan Marshall, the former, Religious Education Adviser for schools and Director of the Plymouth Centre for Faiths and Cultural Diversity.

In order to honour Solly's legacy and make sure his crucial message continues to be heard, Jonathan will be offering sessions based around Solly's life and experiences. They will also focus on the vital lessons for today, particularly with an increase in hate crime; the need for respect, understanding and shared values, especially when we encounter those who come from different religious and cultural backgrounds.



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The one-hour sessions are most suitable for Year 6 pupils and above (possibly Year 5) but it is important that pupils have a good understanding of the context of the Holocaust within the Second World War.

For more information on availability or to book a session, please contact Plymouth Centre for Faiths & Cultural Diversity (PCFCD) on 01752 254438 or email info@pcfcd.co.uk.