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My Family Story *Local eighth graders delve into their*

family histories

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BY MELISSA APTER



Through musical displays, videos and visual arts, local eighth grade students related their personal family history and connection to Judaism as part of the My Family Story project, a global educational program sponsored by Beit Hatfutsot — The Museum of the Jewish People.



Two Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community School students, Rivi Goloskov and Eitan Murinson, were selected to advance in the international competition. Goloskov's "Fighting for Judaism" and Murinson's "The Special Guests" will be sent to Beit Hatfutsot in Israel as one of approximately 200 projects to be judged and narrowed down to a pool of 40 winners, who will be invited to tour Israel and meet Jews from different communities worldwide.

Lizabeth Shrier, sixth grade humanities and eighth grade ancient history teacher, explained how the projects displayed at the Jewish Museum of Maryland through March 15 dovetailed with the first eighth grade ancient history unit: identity. The students, she continued, were given free rein with artistic expression and what aspect of their heritage they wanted to share. All eighth graders participated.

Shrier, alongside music teacher Russell Kirk, creative arts department director Jason Dougherty and art teacher Shelly Spector — who all helped the students craft their projects — saw tremendous engagement and growth from her students.

“From day one there was a real buy-in where students were excited to explore their own families and their own histories,” said Shrier. “Then I saw kids who didn’t have a lot of interest at first — ‘my family doesn’t have any interesting stories to tell’ — but after digging deeper, talking to family members, they opened up and saw there was so much more to their families.”

Goloskov, 13, created a piece using photos and newspaper clippings from her great-grandfather’s scrapbooks. Mickey Goloskov, she discovered, fought in the Battle of the Bulge, one of World War II’s deadliest battles, and also served as a photographer, capturing moments of the war for the regiment newspaper. Among the discoveries that touched her most was a postcard penned by her great-grandfather that read, “Went to synagogue this morning and prayed for the first time with tefillin.”

Noting that many soldiers ceased to practice their religion after witnessing the horrors of war, Goloskov said, “Overall, it was a great experience to learn about my family history, to know that my family stuck with Judaism is inspiring to me.”

“‘Fighting for Judaism,’ that one stood out to me right away,” said Valerie Thaler, a BT high school Jewish history teacher who judged the displays alongside fellow BT high school teacher Paul Bolenbaugh, a Johns Hopkins University professor, a Jewish Museum board member and Shula Bahat, CEO of Beit Hatfutsot of America.

Sen. Ben Cardin (D-Md.) and Baltimore City Councilwoman Rochelle “Rikki” Spector also took time to tour the exhibit.

“Basically, what stood out to me was the amount of depth the project had,” said Thaler. “It made me want to go and read the whole scrapbook.”

Murinson, 14, described his project as a hybrid that combined media and music. He connected the musical heritage of his great-great grandparents, who worked the vaudeville circuit from New York to Chicago, with the band his parents played in called The Special Guests that gave musical presentations at Jewish venues around Baltimore.

To honor his family’s musical heritage, Murinson created a stage and performed two songs: “The Teddy Bear’s Picnic” and “Erev Shel Shoshanim,” the former a popular tune from his great-great

grandparents' era and the latter a standard from his parents' repertoire.

Thaler said that with Murinson on stage, "it was very much like you were a viewer and you were experiencing the show."

Though Murinson is no stranger to performance — he plays piano, sings and recently participated in the high school production of "Les Miserables" — he was in shock when his project had won.

"I was in disbelief. I actually had to go to the nurse," said Murinson. "I'm really amazed that my project is going to be shown on this [international] stage. I'm ecstatic!"

He also appreciated getting an opportunity to view his classmates' projects.

"Everybody put so much work into their projects. It was really great to be able to reach into my family's history at Beth Tfiloh," said Murinson. "I think we're in a great environment and all the kids really enjoyed it."

"Opening night was emotional," said Shrier. "Often there were three generations of families there who were all feeling so connected to one another and feeling connected to their Jewish identity."

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