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A PENNY FOR A SOUL

ESL teacher in Joliette creates unique Holocaust awareness program



ESL teacher Myriam Provost has become a better teacher "since using the Holocaust as a theme" in her class.

Mike Cohen
Quebec Bureau Chief

MONTREAL – Myriam Provost is an English-as-a-second-language teacher for a French public high school in Joliette, a small city of about 20,000 about 50km from Montreal. École Secondaire Thérèse-Martin has a student population of 1,700 and none of them are Jewish.

Provost is one of seven teachers from Quebec, who will leave for Israel in July for a three-week experience as part of the Yad Vashem International Seminar for Educators and it is not too hard to see why she was chosen.

"I applied for the scholarship because I have been

teaching English as a second language in high school for 17 years now and it was only when I started talking about the Holocaust to my students that I felt that they were really interested and amazed and had plenty to ask and say," she noted. "I realize that I have become a better teacher since using the Holocaust as a theme, but also a better person because I think that I show my students how important it is to respect people around us."

As the mother of an autistic child, Provost knows firsthand what intolerance and judgment can do to someone.

"I simply cannot accept to be a bystander and not do anything," she said.

With this in mind Provost has created a unique project called *A penny for a soul*.

She and her students are trying to raise 1.5 million pennies, one for each child murdered during the Holocaust, which represents \$15,000.

"We will donate that money to the Montreal

Holocaust Centre to help them create activities that will raise awareness and teach tolerance to children," she said. "I am proud to say that we have raised our first \$1,000 this year, only in pennies and we have plans to do more elaborate things next school year to reach our goal faster.

As for the trip itself, Provost said she expects to learn more, become a better human being and an even better role-model, teach her students about tolerance and create a network of new friends and partnerships. She would also like this to serve as an opportunity to expand *A penny for a soul* worldwide.

Joining Provost will be Jason Lipstein of General Vanier Elementary School in St. Léonard and Stacey Blumer of Lester B. Pearson High School in Montreal North from the English Montreal School Board and Anne Edgar of St. Edmund Elementary School in Beaconsfield and David Barbiero of Beaconsfield High School from the Lester B.

Pearson School Board. They are being sponsored by the Riva and Thomas O. Hecht Scholarship, Teaching of the Holocaust for Educators Program (www.t-h-e-program.org).

Annie Frenette, who teaches at a private French school, is being sponsored by Jewish community leader Victor David; Provost benefactors are community leaders Dana and Bill Bell while Sabrina Moisan, the educational coordinator for the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre, will also accompany the group with the support of community leaders Irwin Tauben, Janice Levine and Miriam Shuster.

The teachers can now look forward to taking part in a professional development program under the direction of the Faculty of the Yad Vashem Seminars for Educators from Abroad, International School for Holocaust Studies. The goal of the program is to provide professional development activities to teachers for teaching about the Holocaust and antisemitism to students in

the youth sector.

Yaron Ashkenazi, executive director of the Canadian Friends of Yad Vashem in Toronto, noted that the International Educators' Seminar was launched in 1995 and since that time about 3,000 teachers from all over the world, including Canada, have participated.

Lipstein said that he is grateful for this opportunity.

"I am very much looking forward to all of the lectures that the program will offer," he said. "I have a strong passion for Jewish history and culture. As a music teacher, I am most interested in the session that will discuss the music of the Holocaust."

Edgar said that she taught the Holocaust through the story of Anne Frank for a number of years.

"I am excited about the opportunity to expand my teaching effectively and meaningfully through the expert teachings at Yad Vashem," she remarked. "I am looking forward to this impacting upon me both personally and professionally."