

# Survivors share horror to foster healing

► WAGGA

By Kree Nash

HOLOCAUST survivors Esther Buncel and Tom Fleming personify the true meaning of "courage to care".

Despite everything they have endured in losing family and friends in concentration camps and being forced from their homes, each day they share their story in the hope of teaching that the great danger is allowing intolerance and prejudice to take hold.

Residents will have an extraordinary chance to meet with the pair and other survivors of World War II in a current exhibition *Courage to Care* at Wagga's Museum of the Riverina.

Mr Fleming, who has struggled with survivor's guilt, was taken to Auschwitz before being moved to the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

"We were to go into the ovens at Auschwitz in late 1944, but there were 6000 others to go in before us," Mr Fleming said.

"The guard said he couldn't hack dealing with our load of 1000 so he brushed us off and sent us away."

He would become one of 123 children who survived out of more than 16,000.

Despite being just six at the time, Mr Fleming can still vividly recall hiding out in a house to avoid capture, mimicking the camp guards to make them laugh and having to wave his hand over his face on burning days to ensure the ash of the thousands killed didn't land on his face.

He said choosing to tell his story is important in that he wanted to give back to the Australian community.

"I want people to have the courage to care about other people," Mr Fleming said.

"This is why I ask children not to be a bystander, even if it is about something like bullying at school."

Mrs Buncel was never to see her family again after she and her older sister were taken to a farm

## FAST FACTS

**What:** *Courage to Care* exhibition includes Wagga's own local hero Frank Newah-Jarfoi, who is a living example of how one person can make a difference by promoting harmony and tolerance in the local community.

**When:** Now until November 24.

**Where:** Museum of the Riverina Historic Council Chambers site.

by a family friend in 1941.

They later sneaked into the Czernowitz ghetto where they remained eating bread and weak cabbage soup for four years until they were liberated by Russian forces.

She has been a volunteer with *Courage to Care* since it first began, wanting to heal herself by encouraging people to stand up and care for each other.

"It was so traumatic for me, it devastated my inside," she said.

"No one wanted to listen and as an eight or nine-year-old I couldn't understand why no one wanted to listen.

"Then I realised they had their own stories.

"I still needed to heal myself, so I do this for myself, but not just for that reason - I do it for others too."

The exhibition is open to the public until November 24.

## Courage to Care

COURAGE to Care is a program initiative of not-for-profit Jewish community organisation B'nai B'rith.

It tries to warn Australians of the dangers of prejudice and discrimination through understanding the roles of victims, perpetrators and bystanders by exposing them to survivors of the Holocaust.

**HAUNTING HISTORY:** Holocaust survivor Esther Buncel will be sharing her stories from World War II, along with other survivors, at the *Courage to Care* exhibition at the Museum of the Riverina. Picture: Michael Frogley

