

MOREE CHAMPION

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Holocaust survivors share their stories with Moree as part of Courage to Care exhibition



Courage to Care chief volunteer Jeanie Kitchener with Holocaust survivors Eva Engel and Maurice Linker, who demonstrate one of the interactive parts of the exhibition which shows that the more people who come together, the easier it is to overcome injustice.

If it wasn't for the help of some extremely brave people, who had the courage to stand up and do good in the face of grave danger, Holocaust survivors Maurice Linker and Eva Engel believe they wouldn't be here today.

That's the message the pair, along with a band of dedicated volunteers and other Holocaust survivors have been sharing with Moree school children and groups who have visited the [Courage to Care exhibition, currently on show at Bank Art Museum Moree \(BAMM\)](#).

Maurice was born in Romania in 1930 and enjoyed a normal, happy childhood with his parents, sister, large extended family and lots of friends until 1940 when the Soviet Union took over his city, Cernauti.

The Germans took the city in 1941 and wreaked havoc, particularly on the Jewish, who made up half of the city's population.

"They came in and I saw my beautiful synagogue in flames. The rabbi was shot with a hundred other Jews," Maurice said.

The Nazis forced all Jewish people to wear a distinguishing yellow star and crammed 50,000 Jews into a ghetto made for only 5,000 people - "it was bedlam; people were everywhere," Maurice said.

Jewish people could only go out at certain times of the day, "which meant we could not buy food because the markets were shut by the time we were allowed out", and Jewish children were not allowed to go to school or be educated, so Maurice didn't go to school for three and a half years.

During this time, Maurice's eyes had deteriorated and his father got permission for him to go out of the ghetto to get treatment. When he went out into the city wearing his yellow star, Maurice was spat on and called names and at one point was approached by three non-Jewish boys who he used to go to school with.

"They came up to me and said, 'we were asked to beat you up because you're Jewish'," Maurice explained.

"One of them asked, 'but why? He's a good boy, we played with him at school'. He convinced the other boys not to beat me. It felt like I had a friend there."

That was one of the incidents Maurice uses as an example of the *Courage to Care* ethos, when a young boy chose not to be a bystander to evil and had the courage to care for Maurice.

Another incident was when a prison guard left open the door for Maurice's father, an enemy of the state who had been arrested and taken into custody after the family later crossed the border into Romania illegally and changed their name.

"We changed our name so the secret service didn't recognise us," Maurice said.

"Somebody found out we were there illegally and they took my father into prison and started interrogating him. Luckily someone there left the door open so my father could get out."

Twenty-four hours later and Maurice's family made it safely into Romania, before eventually fleeing to Vienna as displaced persons after the war. If that prison guard hadn't left open the door, Maurice believes his family would not have survived.

Meanwhile, fellow child survivor Eva Engel was born in Austria in 1932. Her father was an active member of the Social Democratic Party and also a Jew, making him an immediate target of arrest after Austria became part of the Third Reich in 1938.

Only five years old at the time, Eva remembers the terror as she was not allowed to go out on the streets for fear of being taken away.

"The danger for us was so great we went into hiding," she said.

"My father's political non-Jewish colleagues hid us in their homes. It was at that time that a non-Jewish business partner of my father offered us refuge in Switzerland. All official immigration for Jews was stopped, but we were able to escape. When we arrived in Zurich my father applied for an official job to any country that would have him (he was a qualified engineer, tool and die maker).

"He was a qualified engineer, tool and die maker and it was '38 and pre-war. The war industry was necessary, so he was sent a visa to Australia."

Eva and Maurice's stories are used as part of the [Courage to Care exhibition](#) to demonstrate the power of the individual to make a difference if he or she is willing to stand up and take action to help someone in need.

"The idea is that individuals can make a difference - we all have the courage to stick our necks out beyond our comfort zone and do something," *Courage to Care* chief volunteer Jeanie Kitchener said.

"We're using the extreme example of the Holocaust when people stuck their necks out with lives at risk.

"It's meant to show that there were decent people and that the results of even the smallest caring action can be extraordinary."

By highlighting and honouring the courage of ordinary people who, even in the face of great personal risk, took action to help others in the past, the exhibition challenges visitors to critically reflect on their personal values today. Through its positive message, the exhibition inspires and empowers participants to not be bystanders, but to take positive action when they witness injustice in their everyday lives.

A significant part of the exhibition is a two-hour education program designed for students, which involves a tour of the exhibition by the specially-trained guides and Holocaust survivors, a DVD viewing and

workshops on discrimination and bullying that aim to challenge students to be Upstanders, not bystanders.

"The Moree students have been very taken with it," Ms Kitchener said.

"It's a totally new experience. We've had a very positive response. What comes out in the workshop is amazing.

More than 900 students from across the region will have taken part in the education program by the end of the exhibition in Moree, while 200 adults will also have taken advantage of the free tours. Each week a new group of guides and survivors arrive in Moree to conduct the tours.

[Moree Secondary College year nine student Tayla Simpson participated in the program last week and said she was captivated and inspired by the stories.](#)

The *Courage to Care* exhibition is on at BAMM until November 30. Free tours will be run by the visiting guides during weekdays. Contact BAMM on (02) 6757 3320 to make a booking.