

Letter: Prep will never forget Sonia Weitz

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Photos



Courtesy photo

Sonia Weitz with a group Prep students after she spoke to the freshman class in January 2010. Pictured, front row, from left, Jack McMenamain, '12, of Melrose; Kelsey Brandin, '13, of Portsmouth, NH; Jack Alla, '13, of Marblehead; Sonia Weitz; St. John's Prep religious studies teacher Mary Kiley; A.J. Rossi, '10, of Manchester; Tyler Rossi, '12, of Manchester; and Josh Kumin, '12, of Ipswich. Back row, from left, Sam Dicker, '13, of Marblehead; Thomas Mitchell, '13, of Merrimac; and Matt Chambers, '10, of Marblehead.

By Staff reports

Danvers Herald

Posted Jun 30, 2010 @ 07:13 PM

Danvers —

Editor's note: Sonia Schreiber Weitz, Holocaust survivor of five death camps and co-founder of Holocaust Center, Boston, North, passed away June 23, 2010, at the age of 81.

To the editor:

Remembering Sonia Weitz adequately for all that she has meant to the St. John's Prep community would require a book, but we hope to pay tribute to her generous and courageous spirit with this simple letter.

On a personal level, Sonia's relationship with St. John's began as a parent when her son, Don, attended the Prep and graduated in 1970. Her relationship with St. John's grew, to our great benefit, in 1991 when she first spoke to a group of students who wanted to know how to stand up to injustice. That first meeting

evolved into a yearly visit when every member of the freshman class would have the unequalled opportunity to listen to Sonia's message that "there is no such thing as an innocent bystander." It is remarkable to reflect that some 5,000 Prep graduates have had the privilege of meeting and listening to Sonia Weitz.

It was during these visits, when she shared her life story, that Sonia's inner strength, determination and courage truly soared. She spoke to students about how to stand up to injustices large and small, but more importantly, she became a bright and encouraging mentor for each of them. She urged them to deliberately choose life, no matter how daunting, at every juncture. During the question and answer periods that followed her talks, Sonia's warmth and her delight in engaging with students was obvious to all. Quite simply, she became each student's hero.

The commitment that Sonia made to educating, challenging and supporting students at St. John's was formally commemorated with the annual Sonia Schreiber Weitz Human Rights Award. Established in 1997, the award is presented to a member of the senior class who best exemplifies Sonia's qualities of courage, respect for human dignity and willingness to speak out against anti-Semitism, racism and all other forms of prejudice.

Two years ago, Sonia became deeply aware that while she never stopped telling her story, the time would inevitably come when she, like all survivors, would no longer be alive to carry their message to the next generation. With this in mind, she and others at the Holocaust Center, Boston North founded the Holocaust Legacy Partners program.

Pairing survivors with partners who commit to learning the survivors' stories, this unique program immediately began to ensure that these powerful messages would be shared with the next generation, never to be forgotten.

And again, the Prep community was deeply enriched by Sonia when faculty members Mary Kiley, Michael Leonard and Joe Lovett were asked to become Holocaust Legacy Partners.

Kiley, a Hebrew Scriptures teacher, was deeply moved when she was asked to become Sonia's Legacy Partner. "Getting to know Sonia, experiencing her depth of character, her courage, her integrity, her warmth, her witty sense of humor and her friendship has been a profoundly life-changing experience. I will never be the same. Carrying on her story is a personal mission that I am privileged to have."

St. John's has been enriched beyond measure by our relationship with Sonia and she will be sorely missed. But thanks to her remarkable life and work, she will never be forgotten.

With gratitude,

Albert J. Shannon, Ph.D.

Headmaster

Edward P. Hardiman, Ph.D.

Principal

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