

The Freeman Family Foundation Holocaust Education Centre of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada is pleased to announce that Erin Minuk, a grade 12 student at the Gray Academy of Winnipeg is the 2011 recipient of the Mina Rosner Human Rights Award for her essay, *Lighting the Match Within*. The late Mina Rosner was born in Buchach, now in the Ukraine. During the Holocaust she witnessed her friends, family and community ruthlessly exterminated by the Nazis. The sole survivor of her family, she moved to Winnipeg in 1948.

After the war, Mina Rosner dedicated her life to educating people about the Holocaust and devoted countless hours to speaking engagements with students about the importance of combatting racism and defending human rights. She recorded her war-time experiences in her book *I am a Witness*. In 1990, she returned to Buchach for the first time since the war, and the visit was captured in an award winning CBC documentary called *Return to Buchach*.

After her passing in 1997, Mina Rosner's friend's and family decided to honour her memory and keep her legacy alive by creating "The Mina Rosner Memorial Fund" at the Jewish Foundation of Manitoba. The \$400 prize is awarded annually to a Manitoba high school student whose essay is chosen as the best on the theme of the Holocaust or another other important human rights issue, exemplifying the message that Mina Rosner brought to schools and the general public.

This year's winner, Erin Minuk, a grade 12 student at the Gray Academy of Jewish Education. Erin is a very busy young lady both in and out of school. A talented Torah reader, Erin has volunteered at the Shaarey Zedek minyans since 2006. She has travelled to Israel three times in total, including her participation on last year's March of the Living, which of course took her to Poland as well. Her beautiful singing voice has been heard in the lead roles of two Gray Academy school musicals and this year, Erin was chosen as the regional Nesi'ah or President of B'nai Brith Girls. This is not Erin's first literary award – she has also been the recipient of the the Fern Shawna Rykiss literary award at the Gray Academy.

Erin's essay impressed us with both its depth as well as its style. Ironically, the theme of Erin's essay, is the importance of speaking up, creating change – of not being a bystander. Had it not been for the brave Poles who stepped up and hid Mina, this human rights essay competition would not have existed. This brave family refused to be bystanders.

In her essay, Erin speaks of the "bystander effect" - that the more people present, the less apt anyone is to help someone in need. She talks of the importance of searching within oneself for the courage to be that one person who steps forward to offer help – the match that each of us have with ourselves, just waiting to be lit – what a beautiful metaphor!

Erin also described her experience last year confronting history when she toured Shoah sites in Poland as part of the March of the Living program. Especially poignant for her was the recognition while in Poland of a woman as a Righteous Among the Nations. This modest woman had saved, along with her family, 15 Jewish people. Erin recalled being fearful of standing up to a bully in her childhood and was awed by the woman's courage. That was the moment that Erin's own match was lit. As Erin put it so eloquently, "We are all able to produce change, and know better than to look to our

neighbors to fill our shoes, but we have to reach inside ourselves to bring it out. We must light the match.”