

Failure to stand up for the truth suggests not an open mind but an empty one



Leonard Pitts
Columnist

A man named Josef Buzhminski told this story at the trial of Adolf Eichmann.

It happened on July 27, 1942, at the fence of the Jewish ghetto in Przemysl, Poland. Buzhminski was watching from hiding as an SS man named Kidash seized a Jewish woman and her 18-month-old son. "She held the baby in her arms," Buzhminski said, "and began asking for mercy that she be shot first and leave the baby alive."

"From behind the fence," he continued, "there were Poles who raised their hands ready to catch the baby. She was about to hand the baby over to the Poles. He took the baby from her arms and shot her twice and then took the baby into his hands and tore him as one would tear a rag."

That's just one story — one wrenching, awful story. There are 6 million more like it — 11 million if you count beyond the Jewish victims.

Understand that and you understand the fury over William Latson. He was the principal of Spanish River Community High School in Boca Raton who, in April 2018, had a just-revealed email exchange with an unidentified mother about the Holocaust. As first reported in The Palm Beach Post, she had written to ask how that genocide is taught. Latson assured her the school has many Holocaust education activities, but added that they're not mandatory — "not forced upon individuals as we all have the same rights but not all the same beliefs."

Stunned, the mother pointed out the obvious: The Holocaust is not a "belief." Latson was unmoved, reminding her that "not everyone believes the Holocaust happened," and claiming that he is required to be "politically neutral."

"I can't say the Holocaust is a factual, historical event because I am not in a position to do so as a school district employee," he said.

Those words ignited an uproar. And Latson, you will not be heartbroken to learn, is now the ex-principal of Span-



A perimeter light and barbed wire fence stand at the Auschwitz I memorial concentration camp site on Feb. 15 in Oswiecim, Poland. The Nazis used the Auschwitz camp and its satellite camps for slave labor and large-scale extermination of arriving inmates. In all 1.1 million Jews and others died at Auschwitz between 1940 and 1945. SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES

"... She was about to hand the baby over to the Poles. He took the baby from her arms and shot her twice and then took the baby into his hands and tore him as one would tear a rag."

ish River High.

Which is fine, except that he is less the problem here than just a particularly glaring symptom thereof. Forcing him out does nothing to address the toxic "both-sideism" he represents and that has crept over American education, politics and journalism in recent years.

Sometimes, it's merely disingenuous, an excuse for inaction — like when Republicans pretend they can't be definitive about climate change because there's no scientific consensus. Sometimes, it's fear of the damning word. Like when reporters look at incidents involving nooses, burning crosses or the generous application of the N-word and pronounce them "racially insensitive." And sometimes, it's a misbegotten attempt at even-handedness. Like

when Latson evidences such tender regard for the feelings of Holocaust deniers.

It's a fine thing to maintain an open mind. Intellectual flexibility, the ability to see things from the other side, is to be encouraged. But none of that precludes the obligation to make a judgment, to say flatly what is and what is not.

Failure to do that, failure to stand up for the truth, suggests not an open mind but an empty one — and cowardice, to boot. The truth is already under attack from the White House, the Russians, Fox "News" and other forces of weaponized chaos and organized confusion. Will it now be under attack from the schools, too?

We can't allow that. To allow that is to poison the future. And besides, Josef Buzhminski — and millions of other witnesses and victims of atrocity — deserve better. They are beyond our solace. The least we can do is remember their ordeals and speak them without equivocation.

You wouldn't think that's too much to ask.

Contact Leonard Pitts at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

Larson

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Catholic Charities provides Meals on Wheels locally for "at-risk, homebound, ill, and vulnerable persons age 60 and older." Contact them at 320-229-4584 or 1-800-830-8254, ext. 4584 or SeniorDining@ccstcloud.org.

Should we take the next step and offer medical meals through a health plan? Perhaps because we have local charities that provide this service we don't need to use a health plan. Yet will a charity consistently get the donations and volunteers it needs to keep up with demand? Sometimes nonprofits serve only niche populations. Meals on Wheels specializes in older folks. Yet younger people have health needs, too. Therefore, it may be better to support these meals with an organization that is invested in the health of all its members. Perhaps nonprofits like Meals on Wheels could expand services if they had the financial support of health plans.

Because they want healthy members, some plans discount or reimburse people for gym memberships because exercise improves health. Mayo Clinic's website states that regular exercise improves mood and sleep and can prevent chronic conditions.

Should health plans pay for nutritious food for people of any age with medical needs? Waters has proven it saves money and lives. Maybe it's time to consider this.

This is the opinion of Linda Larson, an Avon resident. She is the author of "A Year in My Garden" and "Grow It. Eat It," which won the national Ben Franklin Award. Her column is published the second Sunday of the month. She welcomes comments at notes4linda@hotmail.com.

Feld

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That evening, she returned to sit in the impenetrable blackness her father wrote about to her mother.

These stories reflect true American heroes that gave their all to ensure every American could maintain the freedoms they were promised 243 years ago.

The staff at the Stearns County Historical Society are true patriots for bringing the encampment to St. Cloud. They truly understand the importance of keeping patriotism alive, while teaching future generations the freedoms we love so much come at an expensive price.

This is the opinion of Gerry Feld, whose column is published the second Sunday of the month. He writes about issues from a conservative perspective and is a published novelist.

Clancy

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I am glad that immigrants receive help from the government, despite the bashing of immigrants by our current president, as Woodrow Wilson bashed German-Americans during WWI. Our ancestors also took government help —

for example, with the Homestead Act.

Fear of Somalis is heightened by their unfamiliar religion. Again, this fear has parallels to the past.

I remember when John F. Kennedy had to allay fear that he would obey the Pope more than the Constitution of the United States. It reminds me of the fear of Sharia.

And complaints about Somali prayer remind me of a story in my Avon cen-

ennial history book where Protestants protested Catholic prayer and instruction in Avon's public school.

Today, conflict between Protestants and Catholics is over. So will be the present ruckus, if we let it. The only thing we have to fear is sowing fear and distrust in our immigrant community by mistreating them.

This is the opinion of Avon resident Jeanette Blonigen Clancy.

Our View

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And then there's ...

While groups like those mentioned above stand out as organizations focused solely on these issues, there are countless other entities — private, nonprofit and public — systematically working to replace negative stereotypes with facts, figures and friendliness.

Witness the Islamic Center of St. Cloud's iftars held earlier this year. It marked about the 10th year the center has invited the public to the evening meal when Muslims break fast during the holy month of Ramadan. The whole point is to bring non-Muslims together with Muslims so people can learn about each other and how being different does not have to be divisive.

As for facts and figures, look no farther than the Stearns County Human Services department's April report "Refugee Resettlement and Public Assistance."

For the fourth time in five years — and to silence continued (and debunked) rumors — the department provided a detailed report on primary refugees it helped, assistance programs available to refugees and ALL residents, and costs and funding sources for these.

Not to be overlooked, too, the report again noted that after three years on state assistance, more Somali (80.5%) than white (72.9%) and African-American (51%) residents were self-supportive. Similar reports and fact sheets have come in recent years from the city of St. Cloud based on federal and state data along with the expertise of local economics experts. And that is just scratching the surface.



Bishop Donald Kettler and members of the Greater St. Cloud Area Faith Leaders present a letter of support in 2017 at the Central Minnesota Islamic Center in St. Cloud. DAVE SCHWARZ/ST. CLOUD TIMES

What are you doing?

Clearly, there are many other organizations — public, private and nonprofit — working across this area to promote acceptance and respect and educate people about cultures, traditions and religions with which they may not be familiar.

The Times Editorial Board invites

you to share your actions — or those of your group or business — through the Times Opinion section. In 200 words or less, explain what you're doing or have done to show acceptance of refugees and immigrants new to this community.

Submissions must include your full name, city of residence and a daytime phone number.

Send them to [\[times.com\]\(http://times.com\) or mail them to SC Times Opinions, 24 Eighth Ave. S, St. Cloud MN 56301.](mailto:letters@stcloud-</p>
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The Times will work to publish them online and in print as space allows.

This is the opinion of the Times Editorial Board, which consists of News Director Lisa Schwarz, Engagement Editor Randy Krebs and Content Coach Anna Haecherl.