

Cheektowaga Bee 41

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Friday, May 26, 2023

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'Winterkill' author discusses book and parallels to today

May 25, 2023

by ELIJAH ROBINSON Reporter

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Skrypuch

Maryvale Middle School students got a masterclass in the perils of war and fascism, and the hope and triumph within it. Ukrainian-Canadian author Marsha Skrypuch went to Maryvale Middle on May 19 and did a presentation on her books: she covered the historical events in her books and discussed the craft of writing and also did book signings.

The latest book she showcased to the students was "Winterkill," a story set during the Holodomor in the 1930s. The framework is the Ukraine's Famine Genocide in the 1930s, which was caused by the Soviets attempt to erase the Ukrainian people and culture.

"The Holodomor happened right before World War II. It happened between 1930 and 1933, and it was done in the Soviet Union and at that time, Hitler and Stalin were brand new tyrants," Skrypuch said. "A lot of the concentration camps and a lot of the killing methods [of the] Holocaust were based on the Holodomor, because they were exchanging information."

The story is told through the eyes of its young main character, Nyls. The book shows that war is not just about death and destruction, but also about the decimation of community, humanity, as well as the most basic human instinct, the will to survive.

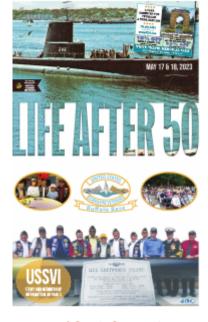
Skrypuch described her book as historical fiction, where the surrounding context is true to reality, and characters are inserted to create a story. Skrypuch said these narratives are an opportunity for students to be exposed to the horrors of war.

"People who are younger have an open mind and are more willing to learn. A lot of adults ... have closed minds, and they've made up their minds about things," she said. "I would rather write books that are aimed at people who are willing to read widely, and to problem solve and to ... do some research after they've read."

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This book was banned in Russia, which prompted Skrypuch being banned from Russia. She said she has faced constant death threats and harassment because of her work, causing her to need protection for her family — intent on causing a chilling effect on dissent. "If you think that it's just the people who hold the gun that are doing that, you're wrong," Skrypuch said. "It's all pervasive and that kind of propaganda works so that people just say nasty things about you all the time. So there's not much I can do about it, and all I can do is hold [my] head high and know that [I've] done what needed to be done."

Being of Ukrainian heritage herself, Skrypuch said writing this book and others like it gave her a chance to tell the truth about what actually happened during these times, countering the censorship surrounding the history. "So much of what I read as I was growing up, I knew was inaccurate, because my own heritage was Ukrainian. So I would hear what really happened in Ukraine, and then I'd read a book about it and I'm like 'That's not what happened, that's not what happened," she said. "Because I'm writing on topics that no one else is writing on, I have an authority, a moral authority to make sure I don't make it up, I look it up."

One aspect that ties Skrypuch's stories of war together is that everyone is connected one way or another.

She is from Brantford, Ontario, and there is an old Ukrainian community there from the turn of the last century, and a lot of them immigrated from Buffalo, New York — most of them previously working at a plant named Pratt & Letchworth, then moving to Brantford when a new branch opened up there. "All these Ukrainians that came from Ukraine settled in Buffalo, then moved to Brantford,"

Skrypuch said. "In one of my books I have Buffalo Street, which was a street in Brantford where Ukrainians settled." The main characters' Alice and Nyls' father is based on a Canadian man with Ukrainian heritage, who was a machine worker. "They lived in Toronto, but they worked at Massey Harris, which also had a plant in Brantford, which also would have had those Ukrainians from Brantford, and then some of them went to Toronto. So this girl's father could have been from Buffalo," she said. "You just don't know the sixth degree of separation that you have from someone else."

In parallel to the present, Skrypuch said these books remain just as relevant as they could have been in 1930s Ukraine. "If no one spoke about these things, then it's just going to get worse," she said. "You've got someone who thinks that it's perfectly fine to take over other countries and to completely eliminate a group of people and replace them with people who look like you, and this is what Putin is doing right now. So if we don't know our history, then we will repeat it."

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Solice Blotter

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Sunday, May 21 • An individual on Losson Road reported a raccoon being aggressive toward people at Losson Park. • Four males wearing ski masks took a resident's Subaru SUV...

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○ Yes ○ No



View Results



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