

Holocaust survivor gets honorary diploma at local high school

Woman connects, graduates with Lake High seniors

5/22/2017

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Eighth-grade English teacher Nikki Bazzoli stands with Holocaust survivor Paula Marks-Bolton of West Bloomfield, Mich., after the 90-year-old walked alongside Lake High School seniors and received her honorary diploma.

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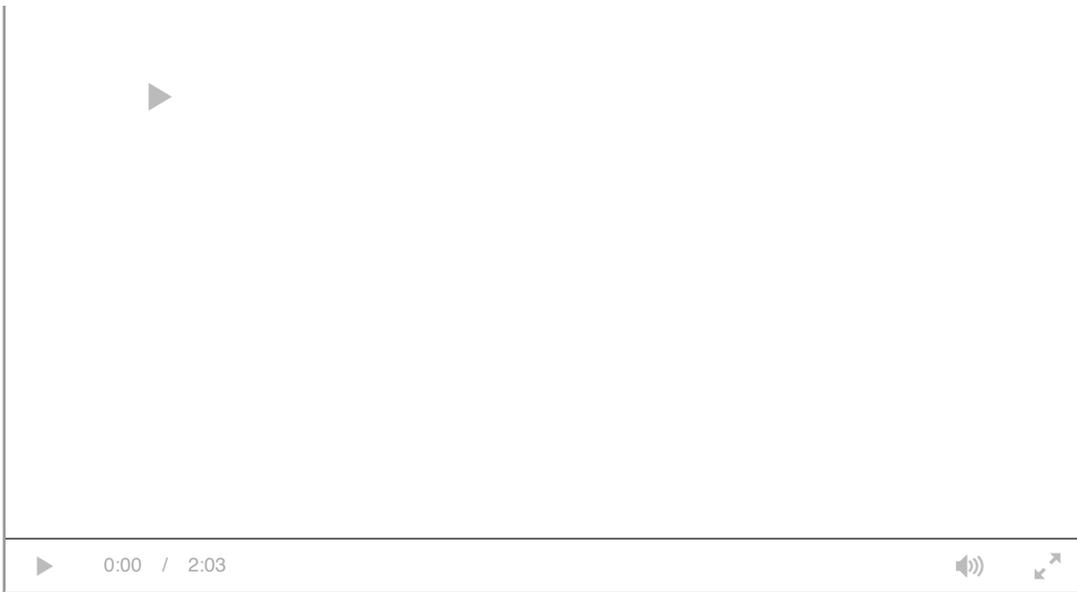
MILLBURY, Ohio — Though she wore the same cap and gown, one graduate at Lake High School this year stood out.

Holocaust survivor Paula Marks-Bolton, 90, of West Bloomfield, Mich., earned an honorary diploma on Sunday, walking alongside a group of seniors with whom she has shared a close bond for five years.

“I am so excited,” she said before the ceremony. “My heart is overwhelmed with joy.”

Mrs. Marks-Bolton was born in Ozarkow, Poland, and was a prisoner in Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and other concentration camps as a teenager after the Nazis invaded Poland when she was 13. She has been speaking publicly about her experiences for 26 years, and met a group of students from Lake Middle School in 2013.

IN PICTURES: Holocaust survivor receives diploma from Lake High School



VIDEO: Paula Marks-Bolton honored by school

“We just happened to be able to spend some time with her afterwards,” said Nikki Bazzoli, an eighth-grade English teacher. “She sat and spoke to each one and held their hands. The kids were so moved by her.”

The students have kept in touch with Mrs. Marks-Bolton, writing letters, sending care packages, and inviting her back to northwest Ohio on several occasions. She spoke at Lake High School in 2015.

“She has such a beautiful point of view on everything,” senior Madelyn Eye said. “Despite everything she went through, she doesn’t have any hate in her heart.”

Mrs. Marks-Bolton lost more than 60 members of her family during the Holocaust, and her message emphasizes love and acceptance. She implores those she meets to make a difference in the world.

“It should never make a difference what nationality, what religion, or what color a person’s skin is,” Mrs. Marks-Bolton said. “Reach out to the ones who cannot help themselves, welcome that stranger, and defend those who cannot defend themselves.”

The woman said she was as taken with the students as they were with her.

“They entered my heart and soul. They are so loving,” she said. “I was overwhelmed with love. They just stuck in my heart. We are connected.”

Miss Eye said the woman talked about seeing her two daughters earn their high school and college degrees, but never received a diploma herself. So the students decided to make it happen.

“She took classes but never actually got to graduate,” senior Kayla Saffran of Northwood said. “It’s really special to have her walk with our class.”

She would have graduated in 1944, so Mrs. Marks-Bolton’s special tassel includes a charm for that year.

“What it means to me after all these years to be graduating in the United States of America, in the beautiful country which I love so much, it’s the greatest honor,” she said.

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