



Avi Benlolo

President and CEO, Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center, Canada

Karen Klein Is the Rosa Parks of Bullying

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Bravo to Torontonian Max Sidorov for [standing up](#) to the bus bullies of Greece, New York and for not being a bystander, despite the distance and the ease of looking the other way. As has been widely reported in the past 24 hours, 68-year-old bus monitor Karen Klein [suffered a malicious verbal attack](#) by a group of grade seven students on a school bus, experiencing the sort of fear and shame that many of us have gone through at some point in our lives. Because of Sidorov, the response to her victimization has been overwhelmingly compassionate.

Although Sidorov was simply hoping to raise a few thousand dollars to send Klein on a special vacation following her ordeal, his campaign raised more than \$500,000 (and counting) in just two days, exceeding all expectations and demonstrating that people are profoundly tired of the intolerance and disrespect so prevalent in society today. There seems to be an increasing level of contempt for older adults and much of that is due to the breakdown of values and lack of education about compassion, caring, empathy and simple respect for one another.

As the saying goes, "kids will be kids," but the level of animosity, degradation, harassment and the length of time the bullying persisted was simply outrageous. As a human rights organization that teaches thousands of students every year about the consequences of bullying and hatred, we often talk about perpetrators and bystanders. What is significant in this episode is the lack of intervention from anyone else on the bus, as well as the apparent lack of concern evidenced by the student perpetrators regarding the taping and posting of the incident.

It is important to point out that this was not merely a matter of bullying. We should clearly understand this event for what it was -- a matter of age discrimination laced with

sexual profanities -- and an episode that has raised the profile of the discrimination faced by many older adults and the elderly in societies across North America.

We think that the decision by the victim to not press charges is commendable. However, more than apologies are needed to change an environment in which children believe bullying behaviour is acceptable; Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center's educational programs are based on the premise that the solution to hate and disrespectful behaviour is continuous education that advocates against bullying and indignity, and teaches empathy and compassion for others. To achieve those educational goals we have designed the [Tour for Humanity](#), a mobile, bus-based Tolerance Center that will visit schools and institutions to focus on the issues of bullying and hate.

Buses seem to be a focus for these sorts of episodes; perhaps because they bring people from different backgrounds closely together they can sometimes be a flashpoint of both disrespect and intimidation, or of more positive interactions, including simple courtesies like people giving up their seats to strangers.

Klein's refusal to interact with the bullies may yet become a wake-up call for society -- in much the same way Rosa Parks' refusal to move to the back of the bus was at the dawn of the civil rights movement -- to mobilize around the issue, not just of bullying, but of the need to respect one another and to treat each other with kindness and dignity.