

4. WHAT WOULD YOU DO?



EXPLORE YOUR IDEAS



1. What choices did the following individuals make after the Schnitzer home was attacked the first time?

Mrs. Schnitzer:

Synagogue leaders:

2. Identify choices made by individuals when the Schnitzer home was attacked a second time.

Mrs. Schnitzer:

The police officer:

Mrs. MacDonald:

3. What other choices did people in the community make?

4. What do you think the police chief means when he says “there’s a greater risk in not doing anything”?

5. What does this story add to your understanding of what it means to belong to a community?

6. If you lived in Billings, do you think you would have risked taping a menorah to your window? Why or why not?

How you view an event or situation—your perspective—can affect your choices. Read the story below about the events one community faced and the choices it made in response. Then, write your thoughts on the facing page.

Excerpt adapted from *Not in Our Town*

In 1992, in Billings, Montana, hate messages began to appear on flyers throughout the community. These messages targeted various minority groups, including Jews, African Americans, gays, and Native Americans. Eventually the messages turned to action—a Catholic church was vandalized, a Native American home was painted with a hate symbol, and a brick was thrown through a boy’s bedroom window displaying a menorah, a special candle holder for nine candles, used during the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

Luckily, five-year-old Isaac Schnitzer was in another room. Mrs. Schnitzer had been nervous displaying the menorah, with all the hate messages in the community. “I felt so cold,” she recalled. “But it wasn’t the winter air coming through the broken window.... It was my fear of what would come next.” Mrs. Schnitzer brought up the problem at her synagogue, but the leaders chose not to speak out. “They felt that to acknowledge a problem or identify ourselves as being different would make us stand apart,” she said.

Meanwhile, as the hate activities continued, a group of citizens decided to take action. When an interracial couple had hate words painted on their house, a group of local painters came to repair the damage. After another attack happened at the Schnitzers, a police officer suggested they take down the menorah. “Maybe it’s not wise to keep these symbols up,” Mrs. Schnitzer told a local paper. “But how do you explain that to a child?” Mrs. MacDonald, the head of a Montana church association, read Mrs. Schnitzer’s quote. She tried to imagine what it would be like to have to tell her own children that their Christmas tree and wreath had to come down because it wasn’t safe.

Mrs. MacDonald phoned her pastor with the idea to have their Sunday school kids draw menorahs and make copies for people in the community to display in their windows. That week, hundreds of menorahs appeared in Billings windows. People realized the possible danger in taking action, but, as Police Chief Wayne Inman responded, “There’s a greater risk in not doing anything.”

The hate groups struck back at first, breaking windows and vandalizing cars and churches. But for every menorah that was there before, ten new ones appeared. Soon, almost 6,000 homes displayed menorahs. “All along, our coalition had been saying an attack on one of us is an attack on all of us,” Mrs. MacDonald said. “And God bless them, the people of this town understood....”

Eventually the hate groups backed off. “The haters could attack a couple of Jewish homes,” said Chief Inman, “but they could not target thousands of menorahs.”