

Children's book author shares story with West Side

By **DREW STOREY**

When Glen Mitchell first heard the story of a certain crew of the Royal Canadian Air Force and their Lancaster bomber making the initial run into the German occupied Holland to drop food, he knew there was the making of a children's story.

But what he didn't realize at the time was that it would be he who would end up penning the story almost five years later.

"I finally made the effort myself," said Mitchell. "If I succeeded, then great. If not, I could then be critical of the people that turned the project down."

The title of Mitchell's book *A Bad Penny Always Comes Back* makes reference to one of the two Lancaster bombers that flew a test run on April 29, 1945 called Operation Manna into Holland to drop food to the starving Dutch.

According to Mitchell, while the Allies were able to liberate the southern part of the Netherlands in 1944, the German administration retaliated to railway strike by putting an embargo on all food transports to the western Netherlands.

The Dutch people were dying at an estimated rate of 1,000 per day. The only thing the crew of the Bad Penny knew was that the Nazi Army had made a verbal agreement not to shoot at the planes as they brought in the food.

Mitchell and his wife Carmel currently live in Windsor, Ontario. Family-friend Diane Coddington, who is associated with St. Anthony's Catholic School, invited Mitchell to the Grand Rapids area to share his book. Last month he read and answered questions from students at both West Side Christian and St. Anthony schools.

The opportunity to share his story with a community that has Dutch roots, some only one generation removed, was seen as an honor for Mitchell.

"Our ultimate goal is to share this story with the people of Holland," said Mitchell.

Currently the story of Bad Penny resonates with people of all ages. One draw for an audience is that Mitchell used the names of real people to tell the story, and the story, though in child book format, represents actual events.

Pilot Bob is a depiction of Bob Upcott, pilot of the Bad Penny, and the Character Peter is Peter Buttenaar, the name of a young recipient of the food received in Holland in 1945.

While young children enjoy the unique illustrations done by Kristen Gallerneaux of Windsor, older children are introduced to an important event in world history.

West Side Christian Principal Jim Goote said Mitchell's visit is being used as a part of the curriculum for the sixth-grade

unit as they learn about the Second World War.

Adults identify similarities between the story and the current war in Iraq.

"The same things are true. Freedom is not free, and things worth having are worth fighting for," said Mitchell.

The more Mitchell talks about this story in schools, the more he learns. Questions asked that he can't answer turn into tomorrow's research projects. Details like one shot was fired at Bad Penny and that the bullet was found afterward are gifted to Mitchell by the radio operator of the bomber Stan Jones as the two of them hit lulls in their book signing stints together, over 60 years after the fact.

Like the fact that the two planes flew only 50 feet from the ground when delivering the food, close enough for one of the crew members to set his watch by what he saw flying next to a church tower.

The story of Bad Penny was first told to Mitchell by S. Michael Beale, President of the Canadian Historical Aircraft Association.

At the end of the presentation, one child told Mitchell that he should write another book.

"Maybe, if I ever hear another story as good as this one," he said.

For more information, visit www.badpennybook.com or call Coddington at 667-0669.