

## World War II Vet Shares Foundation of Success with Students

Written by Steve Yablonski, Nov 12, 2015



*Fred Sarkis enjoys a moment with students applying his life lessons to their own goals.*

VOLNEY – Recently, sixth grade students at Volney Elementary School were visited for the ninth consecutive year by 89-year-old businessman, World War II veteran and author, Fred Sarkis.

Sarkis traveled from Canandaigua for a two-day visit to work with sixth graders in Bill Cahill’s social studies classes.

The students’ work centered around reading a one-hundred page abridgement to Sarkis’ autobiography, *Prisoner of The Truck*.

The abridgement is called “Yes Pa.”

“Yes Pa” tells Sarkis’ story of growing up during the Great Depression in Rochester.

Sarkis was a “skinny, knock-kneed, pigeon-toed, bow-legged” kid who didn’t do well in school and was often picked on and alienated by other students.

During this time, young Sarkis (age 8-14) was working on his father’s vegetable truck for 100 hours a week.

He was also a poor student who did not have many friends; he was a “prisoner” of self-pity and low self-confidence.

Then, during the summer of 1938 at age 12, his “warden father” teaches him three five-minute lessons that change his life forever.

Sarkis becomes a chooser not a loser, takes control of his own life, becomes a top student and becomes a hugely successful businessman.

Sarkis’ time at Volney School included a large group talk reviewing the three lessons and a question and answer period.



*Volney sixth grader Mary Jerred attempts to recreate a sales moment from Fred Sarkis’ childhood.*

During individual class periods there were: role-playing activities, consensus activities, goal setting exercises, attitude reflection tasks, employability evaluations, timeline evaluations and a technology/predicting exercise.

During the student work sessions, Sarkis made his way around the room and interacted with

every student individually, helping them with the activities, answering their questions and offering perspective.

It is this one-on-one time that is his favorite part of his visit.

“I am so impressed with these students when they tell me about their goals, their plans to achieve those goals, their passions and their self-reflective abilities,” he said. “These kids give me hope for our future and really recharge my batteries.”

As for Cahill, he cannot say enough about his friend, a two-time cancer survivor, whom he refers to as “my brother Fred.”



*Fred Sarkis role plays Danny Wegman as Robert Voss interview for a job.*

“Fred has visited more than 100 schools, but ours is the only one he ever spends more than one day at. It has become a home away from home for him. He does not charge our school or district one dime for his visit and I have not met very many educators who have the ability to connect with kids the way Fred does,” Cahill said. “He is an amazing human being who epitomizes The Greatest Generation. There are some character education programs out there that will not even acknowledge that life knocks you down at times. Fred’s message is that life will knock you down, but you don’t have to stay down. By taking control of your attitude and utilizing education, you can get back up when life knocks you down. Fred’s three lessons are simple yet powerful tools for students to start to understand that they are in control of their own destiny. It is so cool to see kids come to that realization through Fred’s story!”

As for Sarkis, he is not for a loss of goals at age 89.

In addition to competing for a national tennis title (age group 85-90), he would love to see the Department of Education embrace his story, have the chance to promote his non-profit program on the Ellen DeGeneres Show and have the chance to dance with her.

Lofty goals for sure, but Sarkis is undeterred!

“Two of the virtues discussed in my story are fortitude and perseverance. I learned about them during the Great Depression and I do not plan on abandoning them any time soon. I’m really hoping to meet Ellen and I really enjoy positive people who have as much energy as I do,” Sarkis said.

***Editor’s note:** “Yes Pa” is a non-profit endeavor, doesn’t seek donations and can be downloaded for free at [Yespa.org](http://Yespa.org). Bill Cahill is currently in the process of nominating Fred Sarkis for a CNN Hero award. Fred is still hoping to hear from Ellen DeGeneres.*

The original article can be viewed [here](#).