

## 2017 Elie Wiesel Competition

1<sup>st</sup> Place Junior Essay

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### Think with Your Head; Act with Your Heart

Have you ever passed by a homeless person without doing anything? I know I have. It's easy to stand up for someone you know, but it's much more difficult to help a stranger. What really surprised me at Hanns Loewenbach's story was how indifferent the Danish border guard was, when a simple act of kindness would have made a world of difference. On the other hand, the S.S. man, who had known Hanns since high school, had made a choice to help him, even though he was breaking the rules to do so. No matter our position in life, our action or inaction has impact beyond what we can immediately see, and justice means thinking with your head and acting with your heart.

The border guard's decision could have meant death for Hanns. Instead of seeing fellow human, hungry, cold and in need of help, he saw a stranger. The law stated that Hanns couldn't cross the border, and the guard told him he can either swim back or he will turn him over to the S.S. He allowed himself to be blinded by obedience or fear, and wasn't thinking with his heart. Is it ever okay for us to consider rules above people? Is it okay to allow fear and not justice to dictate our decisions? I don't think so, and I would like to believe that I would have made a decision similar to Hanns' schoolmate.

Unlike the border guard, the S.S. man, who attend high school with Mr. Loewenbach, chose to ignore the rules and helped Hanns get a passport to escape Germany. As a part of the Schutzstaffel (which stands for "Protection Squadron"), his responsibilities did not include saving the lives of Jewish people, but quite the opposite. Yet this man chose to think with his heart. He saw Hanns as a human being, deserving of respect and care. We all have a choice to act like either the border guard or the S.S. man.

I think I am much more like Hanns' schoolmate. I have stood up in defense of my friends when I felt like their property or privacy was not being respect by others. I had asked, pleaded, and finally grabbed a phone from a girl who was going through my friend's property without permission. I think that it is important to think about the rules, but right and wrong is not defined by them. Hanns' schoolmate didn't follow the rules, even though they were widespread, because they were not in agreement with his heart. Hitler was well liked in his country, but it didn't mean that the rules he created were right. I believe we should all be treated with fairness, and not judged by how popular we are, the clothes we wear, or how smart we seem.

To be just is to include all people equally. Laws are a great start, but laws can sometimes be wrong. It is important to understand the rules, and to think about them, but ultimately the heart will guide you to make a better choice. The video strengthened my belief that we should not judge people by what we see on the outside, because on the inside we are all human. I advocate for justice by remembering and reminding people that when we only use our head to judge people it is easy to see all the differences. When we use our heart we remember we are all the same.