

2017 Elie Wiesel Competition

2nd Place Junior Essay

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When Love Stands

How can the Holocaust be described with a single feeling? How can all of its horrors and injustices be categorized into a single emotion? Hanns Loewenbach's film was the source of far more than one feeling. While watching the video, I experienced anger, sadness, shock, horror, disbelief, helplessness, confusion—but the most important feeling that I experienced was guilt. I obviously wasn't a part of the Holocaust, so I was confused as to why I was experiencing guilt, of all emotions. I also did not completely understand what I was watching. How was someone able to do this, both physically and emotionally? How could so many people lose faith, lose their dreams, lose their *lives*, when so many people were against the Holocaust? How was it that this went on for such a long time, when clearly more people were against it than for it?

These questions were answered towards the end of the video with a single quote by Hanns Loewenbach: "Evil does not need your help. Just your indifference." It was indifference that had fueled the Holocaust for so long. It was indifference that had justified the Holocaust as right. This is where guilt came in. Was doing nothing really as evil as using babies a target practice or leading people to their deaths in gas chambers? Were the people that watched as Hanns Loewenbach was beaten for three days as much to blame as the people who beat him? What about me? How many times have I stood to the side, *indifferent*? Was I as guilty as the people I watched?

The answer is yes. Injustice as fire. It starts out as a little flame, bright and innocent. But the flame will grow. Imagine watching the flame as it expands. Of course, you're not giving anything to the flame, but by not doing anything you're doing something just as beneficial to the flame: you're letting it burn. Every fire can be put out by water, but the question is, who will put it out? Will I put it out, or watch, indifferent as it spreads?

After watching this film I have been inspired to stand up. Against injustice, inequality, prejudice...anything that goes against what I myself believe is morally right, I will stand up against. Never again will I contribute to evil by being a bystander. Never again will I be indifferent to the suffering of others, even if I am not the one being targeted. Because by being indifferent, I am so much to blame as the targeted. I refuse to fuel the flame by watching it burn. I refuse to stand for nothing, and stand for injustice as I do so.

So this is my pledge: When someone is being bullied, I will stand up. When someone is being hurt, I will stand up. When someone is being discriminated against, I will stand up. When someone is faced with injustice, I will stand up. Each person who stands up for justice is infinitely more powerful than each person who stands for injustice, because love is infinitely more powerful than hate. And when I stand up, I may not do it in the most bold way. Standing up doesn't have to be bearing a gun and walking onto the battlefield. Standing up is hiding twelve Jews in the basement of a German officer, like

Irene Gut Opdyke. Standing up is making speeches and organizing peaceful protests, like Martin Luther King, Jr. Standing up is Galileo Galilei going against previous scientific theories and maintaining his own beliefs even in the face of physical threats. Standing up is Alexander Hamilton fiercely defending the U.S. Constitution in the face of hatred. Standing up is Rosa Parks refusing to give up her bus seat. Standing up is Hanns Loewenbach's schoolmate retrieving a passport for him, even though the schoolmate was a German officer. Standing up is telling the story of the Holocaust when people believe it never happened.

From the smallest acts of defiance to the bold stances, these are people who never let injustice burn. And that is what I strive to be: a single voice of love in a chant of hatred, who inspires others to go a different way, to choose to do the right thing, even if it is not the easiest thing. And by doing this, the people without a voice will be heard. The people with a scream of hate will be silenced. Elie Wiesel said, "The opposite of love is not hatred, but indifference." Maybe we need to stop making the people consumed with hatred try to love and start convincing the people who want to love to stand up. Maybe we need to focus less on the evils of the world and start working towards all the goodness that could occur if we actually do something about it. Maybe we need to stop running from the fire alone and start putting it out together. The reason we must learn about the Holocaust is not so we can hate what happened, but so we can prevent it from happening again. We can prevent it, if we stand up. When love stands, hatred will fall.