

2015 Elie Wiesel Competition

1st Place Senior Poetry

Jaden Baum, 10th Grade

Norfolk Academy, Patricia Hume

When Enough Isn't

She spoke to us today
All accent and prim propriety
And impeccable lipstick.

We hear similar stories
Year after year.
Slides of rail cars and wistful children
Flash past eyes glazed with exhaustion.

Occasionally the gruesome shock value
Garners a reaction,
A shiver, a wayward glance,
Yet we stir restlessly in our seats.

This far-off past
Portrayed in monochrome
And sepia slides
Feels redundant yet distant.
Statistics and facts
Can be called up on a whim
Yet we cannot grasp
Their full meaning.

It does not strike us that she,
She of the coiffed hair
And sensible shoes
And pale visage
Represents more than
An obstacle between us and lunchtime.

We fail to comprehend
That the hands fiddling with the microphone
Once gripped the fences of a concentration camp
Until the rusting metal
Pushed diamond-shaped dents into her dirty palms.

The nose she daintily dabs with a tissue
Inhaled far too often the smoke
Produced by the crematoriums
Where millions perished,
Often as a result of uncontrollable circumstances.

And those eyes, piercing still behind bifocals,
Bore witness to countless unspeakable tragedies
That serve to make her story
And the stories of all survivors
Uniquely chilling.

And the fact that we applaud,
Politely,
Robotically,
And leave the room without a second thought
Demonstrates intolerable disrespect.

The true tragedy lies in the fact that
If we behave so flippantly
After hearing the story of a true, real,
Flesh and blood victim
Of the consummate atrocity to which minorities were subjected,
The scarce amount we care now
Will become infinitesimally small
Once they pass away.

People ask why the message of the Holocaust
Matters today and in the future.
They inquire why these hard truths should be stressed to a highly repetitive degree.

To them I reply
History does indeed repeat itself if left alone.
And I refuse to lay the grounds for a future genocide
Simply because a high schooler wants to study for a quiz.