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Obligated By Experience

Many Holocaust survivors felt the obligation to tell others of their experiences after the war. This feeling of obligation came from their desire to never forget the traumatic experience and the innocent people who were lost, the hope to change history by teaching the horrors of the Holocaust, and to inspire the ones who listen by encouraging them to fight for what they believe is right.

As children, we are taught that sharing is one of the most important things in understanding, empathizing and sympathizing with other people while expressing our feelings towards a particular person or situation. After experiencing an emotionally distressing event, the first thing many want to do is to turn to their friends, family, or faith. This can be attributed to the fear that staying silent is lead by forgetting, denial, or betraying those who were lost. All of the victims of the Holocaust lost someone or some part of their life during those horrid twelve years. Elie Wiesel said in his book, Night, "To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time." (XV) By not telling others about the challenges they faced or the stories of the lives of the people who were lost while in the concentration camps, kinder-transport hostiles, or the Jewish ghettos, many felt guilty or like they betrayed those who were lost by not continuing their stories. As millions of people were transported into camps, many of whom would never come out, people felt betrayed by their faith. How could their God allow such a massacre of his chosen people? This is clearly shown in Elie Wiesel's Night when he says, "Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never." (25) When survivors tell their stories to others, talking about what they experienced helps them move forward with their lives, overcome their losses

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and regain their confidence in their faith and humanity.

The stories told by survivors impact history by providing different perspectives of the Holocaust through concentration camps, refuge, and the many other horrors. All of the stories and testimonies told are biased from the storyteller leading to a change in history and people's perspectives. The survivor's stories change history by providing inside information from their experiences during the Holocaust without speculation from historians. In this manner, the survivors educate people while lessening the chance of a historical relapse. These testimonies have been published and are easily accessible through libraries, the Internet, school, and many other sources. As the survivor's made their stories public, it brought down an invisible barrier by allowing people to ask questions and learn from the past without having this feeling of shame and pity hanging over their heads whenever they asked. "Once you bring life into the world, you must protect it. We must protect it by changing the world." (Wiesel) When people are educated about the horrors of the Holocaust it allows us, as a society, to protect one another and prevent those who try to do harm from repeating the past and saving people from another massive loss of life.

Those who listen to the narratives told by the survivors are given a new set of responsibilities that force them to strengthen their moral compass and realize how the actions of one can affect millions. As a generation who didn't have to experience the terrors of the Holocaust or World War II, listeners of the survivors tales are forced to try to empathize with the pain and suffering experienced without saying the age-old phrase, "I understand what you went through," because we don't. Nothing that has ever happened in our lifetime could allow us to experience what happened in those camps or the pain of being ripped away from our families, but as listeners we try and learn and make sense of those twelve senseless years. When trying to answer those unanswerable questions put forth by the era,

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listeners are forced to realize how not standing up for what we believe is right can be detrimental for all those involved; making bystanders just as awful as Nazi's.

In conclusion, this obligation from experience that the Holocaust survivors had pushed upon them forced them to never forget those horrific memories and the people who were lost, to change history and lessen the chance of a historical relapse, and to inspire listeners to strengthen their moral compass and to stand up for what they believe is right. After learning about the Holocaust for many years, I've learned that people like to act in their best interest, and that when we are scared or threatened we don't make the best choices. The nice neighbors with whom you've shared dinner with could suddenly become your worst enemy if their family is threatened, and people can and will take a beautiful religion or theory and twist it to fill their evil agenda if it allows them to gain the attention and firepower they need. This rationality can be connected to the Holocaust in Hitler twisting everyone's belief of Judaism to being detrimental to the German nation and even today to the Charlie Hebdo shooting. The shooters from France were twisting the beliefs and ideas of the Arabic religion to use it as a reason to murder those twelve people. Those two gunmen were not shooting those people to please their God, but to light the spark of conspiracies and riots between Jewish and Muslim people and to drive them further apart. Each year I gain a new perspective of the Holocaust after reading the books of many different people, each who had a very different outcome. Ranging from The Diary of Anne Frank to The Children of Willesden Lane, each testimony gave me a different insight to the feelings, living conditions, and hopes of the people affected in the Holocaust. Within each book, testimony, and story there was a different lesson to be learned, but the one that stayed constant throughout was the idea that hatred spreads like wildfire, and if it isn't stopped it will consume us all.

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