

2015 Elie Wiesel Writing Competition

1st Place Senior Essay

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To Tell a Story-- סיפור לספר

By telling “our stories,” we share a piece of ourselves and open up to judgement, compliment, and criticism. We step outside our comfort zone and become more vulnerable. Some stories however, are so powerful that these concerns are incapacitated. Holocaust survivors share a unique experience that sets them apart from others. They have endured a pain and suffering unequal to any other. The stories they tell keep the painful memories living inside them. Because of this, many use the stories to remember those who did not survive the camps; those less fortunate. There is a belief in Jewish culture that the dead live on through the memories of the living. Elie Wiesel once wrote, “all survivors must act as a messenger of the dead among the living.”¹ As the few who survived, they feel it is their obligation to remind people of the many who did not. For others, there is a fear that if they are silent, their memories and experiences may disappear, thus creating another genocide. Many promised themselves that if they survived, they would share their experience to honor those who died, and to ensure the “evil” they experienced would never be repeated.

Survivors of the Holocaust experience the pain of remembrance every day. The smell of human flesh, “the taste of corpses,”² the cruelty of the Nazis, and much more. The stories they tell us place us in their shoes. We smell the smoke, taste the death, and feel the pain of being struck by an officer. It is a natural reaction to feel a connection to these painful stories. When I hear the different stories of survival, I am filled with anger and awe - anger at the animals who carried out these acts, and awe for the people who managed to survive this terrible event. These stories make me think how I would have dealt with the Holocaust. They put my priorities of today’s world into perspective. As each story unfolds, I feel not only the pain of the survivor, but also the pain of the bystanders, who let such an evil take place. It is impossible to disable my mind from experiencing these thoughts. I am unable to keep quiet. I hope that others experience similar emotions and will work to prevent anyone from experiencing such agony. As a new generation, we must work together to prevent these events from happening again. We take the responsibility to spread these stories like wildfire. These stories must not go unheard. We must ensure this suffering never happens to our children, grandchildren, or future generations.

The horrors of this time have been documented and recorded as one the most organized efforts of exterminating a large population of individuals. Different ways to preserve these stories have been created. Over sixty museums worldwide have been built to memorialize the horror that occurred.³ People of all countries have been exposed to and repulsed by the images and facts documented. All come away with the same thoughts in their heads: “how could humans ever let this happen?” However, in today’s complicated world, people are still targeting others because of their beliefs. In Europe, anti-Semitism is on the rise again. Jews in France are hesitant to wear their yarmulkes in public for fear of

¹ Wiesel, Elie. *The Accident*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p.45.

² Wiesel, Elie *Night*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), p.65

³ “Jewish Studies: Global Directory of Holocaust Museums.” *Israel Science and Technology Homepage*. N.p.,n.d. Web. 26 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.science.co.il/Holocaust-Museums.asp>>.

assault. On January 9, 2015, Jews were killed and held hostage in a kosher supermarket in Paris. Other religions are also being targeted. Throughout the Middle East and Africa, massacres and executions are being carried out because of religious differences. Can the memories and history of the Holocaust be enough to stop humanity from recreating another genocide? This question is always present in the minds of Holocaust survivors.

Elie Wiesel once wrote: "To forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time."⁴ Hearing these horrific stories, and creating a future free of these atrocities, is a way of honoring the dead, and ensuring that their suffering did not occur in vain. As a descendant of Holocaust survivors, I feel it is my duty to ensure these stories are passed on and the memories are kept alive. As the world evolves, we must use our voice to stop people from being targeted for their differences. The lessons of the Holocaust must remain fresh in our minds to incite us to create a better world of acceptance. While it is the Holocaust survivor's personal responsibility to tell these stories and our personal responsibility to hear and learn from them, what one does with the information is ultimately up to each of us.

⁴ Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), p.xv