

2nd Place Senior Essay
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Humanity's Truth

'Truth' is a daunting, all-encompassing concept that has been sought throughout time. Ancient philosophers strove to pioneer rational truth, religious leaders looked to envision spiritual truth, and national reformers tried to pursue societal truth. Unlike these different paradigms and ideas that have been debated, undermined, and replaced, there is a greater truth innate in everyone that stands immune to such discretions. This is humanity's truth - the experiences and motives that shape a person's life and character that are empowered to be shared with the world. In the Holocaust, Hitler abused his position of power to silence these truths of Jews and other minorities, fabricating a disconnected and therefore unsympathetic society open to dangerous rhetoric. To prevent such tragedies from ever happening again, it is imperative that we salvage these lost truths with personal testimonies and eyewitness accounts, using these timeless stories to bridge the gap of understanding between history's ostracized people and modern civilization.

Holocaust survivor Hanns Loewenbach's life as a Jew in the heart of Nazi Germany warns humanity of the escalation of hateful propaganda and indifference. By blaming the Jews for Germany's loss in World War One, Hitler belittled a group of individuals with distinct lives and perceptions down to a singular drag on Germany that could be easily loathed by the masses. It was because of this fallacy that 10 schoolboys beat Hanns for three school days straight. No other classmates stepped up to help. This damaging foundation of indifference and youth indoctrinated with hate allowed for the systematic isolation of the Jews from people's society. Hanns Loewenbach saw this firsthand as his father was sent to one of the first concentration camps, and as he witnessed Kristallnacht on the streets of Berlin. Forced on the truth, Hanns had no way out because his truth was marginalized in the eyes of everyone. His situation seemed hopeless, until one day, an S. S. officer gave him a passport to escape because the

past friendship that they had in school triumphed over the artificial division that Hitler had manufactured. It was in this moment, when someone from home took a risk to give back his legitimacy and the voice, that Hanns could finally remark that he “became a human being.” His truth of humanity had been restored.

We need to learn from personal testimonies as they give a voice back to those who have been long ago silenced and inspire us to give a voice to everyone today. Hence, they are our defense against modern-day ignorance and dangerous “false truths” like the ones spread in Nazi Germany. The depth and authenticity that detailed accounts contain confront bigoted claims with indisputable proof of what occurred in a way that historical analysis subject to interpretation cannot. These primary sources must be used to do justice to the diverse stories of hardships that are too often categorized under impersonal statistics and summaries. What is more, the vulnerability in the description of common human threads, such as love and family, forges a strong connection between Holocaust victims and modern-day people. This greater familiarity in viewing people as more than just a demographic is what instills the courage in people to stand up for the ostracized instead of listening to prejudiced claims. How can we use personal testimony to not only keep Holocaust history alive but also inspire people to speak out for those outcast in our society today?

The greatest tool that we have to do so and thus prevent prejudiced fallacies from taking control of society is each other. Through community-minded events with the focus on reading and discussing stories, we apply the lessons of the Holocaust to today and reject the alternative facts and attempts to divide us. Discussion groups at the library sponsored by the city can examine Holocaust testimonies and use them to branch out into additional topics, such as combatting denial or other genocides. Special presentations to students, an important audience for facilitating acceptance in the future, can promote the importance of education with primary sources, not just the facts alone. In whole-heartedly listening to the ideas from both eyewitness accounts and each other, we can create a community that collectively

understands the importance of listening to everyone's perspective. This way, society as a whole will not be willing to sacrifice the sincere truths of its constituents for an "false truth" orchestrated by evil.

As Hanns Loewenbach stated, "evil does not need your help; just your indifference." This emphasizes the need for the community to share the willingness to courageously speak out against seeds of hate before they can grow out of hand. As long as the majority uses personal testimonies to protect and listen to everyone in society, regardless of race, religion, or creed, then the evil zealots' claims will be unwarranted. When one loses the ability to see, without an agenda, humanity's truth in other people, he loses what separates us as humans from animals - the ability to empathize.

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