

Honorable Mention (tied) Junior Essay
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Footsteps

My great-grandmother, Esther Goldman, was one of the survivors of the Holocaust. For many years, she never shared her story. Once she learned that there were actually people who believed the Holocaust never existed, she knew it was her responsibility to speak for the six million who were silenced. She became very passionate about reaching out to students and educators alike. Her speeches impacted many students, who, having listened to her story, also became witnesses to the atrocities of the Holocaust. As Elie Wiesel said, “Whoever listens to a witness becomes a witness.”

My great-grandmother bravely told her story at schools, military institutions, churches, community events, and many other groups and organizations throughout our area, because she understood that one day there would no longer be witnesses alive to share their stories firsthand, and therefore, it would be up to the next generations to remember and continue teaching. Although she never expected or wanted recognition, one of her most beloved items was a box filled with letters she received from students who were moved and inspired by hearing her speak. One student wrote, “After spending several weeks on the Holocaust in school, most of us think we know everything about it. Nothing can compare to actually seeing somebody who lived through it.”

The *What We Carry* program strives to record interviews with survivors, upstanders, and liberators of the Holocaust. One of the interviewees featured in the *What We Carry* program is Dame Mary Barraco. Mary acted as a volunteer for the Red Cross to get inside the detention area in her home city in Belgium to help prisoners of war escape. It is inspiring to know that there are people, like Mary, who would literally risk their own lives to save others because they feel a moral obligation to do so.

It's sad to think that even today, 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, that hate continues to ravage our communities. Because of the rallies, because of the violence, because of events like the Pittsburgh shooting, I am scared to go to temple on Saturdays. I am scared to see police officers standing on the steps of my synagogue. But Mary's story gives me hope. It gives me hope that there are more people out there like her, people who will risk their lives to save others, who will protect against prejudice, and who will try to end the hate. It gives me enough hope that I believe I can stand up for myself and others in the face of hatred or injustice. It gives me hope that I can follow my moral compass to freedom.

Although it is impossible to imagine, and I hope and pray I'll never have to answer the question of, "what would you do if..." I would like to believe that I would follow my moral compass and do what I know is right. I would like to believe that I would follow in the footsteps of Dame Mary Barraco, and risk my life to save others. I would like to believe that I would follow in the footsteps of Elie Wiesel, who never stopped persisting to educate himself. "After the war, when the adults asked the kids what they wanted, a little girl asked for chocolate, a boy asked for a coat, but Professor Wiesel asked for the same volume of Talmud he was studying before the Holocaust." (said by Rabbi Ariel Burger, one of Wiesel's closest students and friends). Most of all, however, I would like to believe I would carry the strength, courage, and fortitude of my great-grandmother, who never stopped to think, "what should I do?"

As the great-grandson of a Holocaust survivor, I assume and accept the responsibility to educate as many people about the Holocaust as I can, so nobody forgets what happened. I believe it is my responsibility to provide hope to people by following my moral compass, just like Dame Mary Barraco. I believe it is my responsibility to educate myself, and find who I am as a person through Judaic studies. I believe it is my responsibility to help.