

2nd place Junior Poetry
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Next Door

Next door the aging couple props open the door with a splintered orange crate.

You hear the roll of four rusty bikes going into the attic through the paper thin walls.

Throughout the next week collecting children's clothes, once nice, but now tainted with the raw crust of dirt.

You understand what's happening next door. They are preparing for a storm;

Not a storm with strong winds and heavy sheets of rain; but a storm of ethical dilemmas.

One rainy afternoon you hear the couple return, their slow footsteps rattle the walls.

And then another set, and another, and another, each quicker and younger.

There was a family. Their gold starred jackets that shone through the window tell the story.

They lived silenced in the basement next door.

Four weeks.

Tap, Tap, Tap, the door knocker sings.

The round-faced elderly man from next door.

He had tears in his eyes, "Tomorrow they will come to investigate the house, please can you help?"

You're unsure, "What if they investigate here?"

"Your attic is big enough to conceal-"

You remember the large trunks with a false bottom, just big enough to fit an adult.

Your mind races, trying to see which option would beat the other.

Your palms leak a stream of sweat and your pulse bounces your chest up, down, up, down like a trampoline.

You would be risking your safety, but if the plan succeeds, you'd be saving four young lives.

“Yes.”

Next door, you hear the joyful giggles of the children through the walls. They’d have to share a trunk, but it would be worth it.

The young people entered the attic at half past three the next morning.

You supplied them with some small rations.

Next door the line of soldiers ransacks the house, tearing through the cupboards.

Nothing.

They enter your home.

Slam doors open.

Tear up a square of flooring that looks like a trap door.

Stomp up the stairs.

Search.

Nothing.

Next door there is a family of six. Four Jews and two Christians.

In your home, a fifth Jew.

Hiding them took courage.

The same courage that you use every day.

Next door, down the street, a country over, the other side of the earth.

Decisions. To share or to hide. To listen or ignore.

Being a Witness.