

"The Letters"

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Our Lady of the Elms

Word Count: 987

It was January 19, 1940 when the first letter came. My little brother, Henri, is the reason for the letters. He is four years old, has blonde, curly hair, blue eyes, and

muscular dystrophy, but he is a source of joy in our family. Since October of last year, more and more hospitals opened for children like Henri. These letters promoted the hospitals and the ways he could benefit from them. My parents refused the numerous offers, as they could not imagine living without Henri.

During the same time, our family was aware of Jewish persecution and rumors of The Final Solution. We were not Jewish, so we assumed we had nothing to worry about, and we would not be affected. My parents believed that we would wait until the war ended, and everything would return to normal. My father instructed us to stay out of the way of the Nazi soldiers and Gestapo and let them carry out their work. He did not agree with what they were doing, but he did not want to become one of their targets. Henri was too young to know what was going on, and he lifted our spirits and provided a distraction from the chaos. One day, my mother asked if we could help a Jewish family in our neighborhood; father responded, "If they are not bothering us, we will not bother them." This comment bothered me. It seemed that if others were in need, we should be of assistance to them. I knew, however, that I should not say anything. After all, he was my father, and I did not want to add to the rigidity that was already present.

The letters were beginning to arrive more and more frequently. Previously, they had arrived about once every two months, but now they were arriving every week. My mother heard through some friends that children were now required for placement in these special hospitals. Tension was high in the house when a new letter arrived. Secretly, we all knew there would be a day when, instead of an advertisement, a letter would arrive stating that Henri would be forced to enter a facility.

Commented [1]: good!

One day, that letter came. It was July 8th, 1940. Gone were the artfully placed graphics and pictures; they were replaced with a grim provision confirming our greatest fear. We had a month to send him to a facility, and at the end of that month, a medical official would come to transport him from his happy life.

Two weeks later, it was the day before we sent Henri away. My father and I would say goodbye at home, and my mother would take the train with him to the clinic. We spent the day enjoying his presence for the last time. At that time, we did not truly know where we were sending him. We did not know this pediatric institution was a piece to the enormous puzzle that was Hitler's Final Solution. We did not know we would never hear his lighthearted giggle again. We did not know the great pain he would experience at the hospital.

Commented [2]: very good use of parallel structure!

Finally, the dreaded day came. My mother woke us very early. We went through our daily routine so as not to worry Henri. After the painful goodbye, my mother started the journey with my brother to the hospital. Shortly after, I noticed that in her haste, my mother had dropped his most prized possession: a worn rag doll, made for him by her. I picked it up and carried it to his room. I left it on his bed so he would find it when he came back. I did not know that I would never see him again.

Weeks passed. We had been expecting updates on Henri, but none came. My mother grew more and more worried. My father rarely showed his emotions, but even I could tell that he was concerned. These weeks turned into months. Still, we did not receive any messages regarding Henri. My mother, who was trying to be optimistic, supplied alternate suggestions as to why we hadn't received a report. We held out hope, but secretly knew that we would never receive a report. We were all confused;

was the hospital trying to hide something? Maybe his condition had deteriorated. Maybe everything was fine, and the hospital was only delayed. We never thought that the reason for a lack of letters was so **severe**.

Commented [3]: ominous?

Finally, we received an envelope from the hospital. The relief on my mother's face was evident. She opened the letter and her expression immediately changed. She dropped the document. She brought a trembling hand to her mouth, and I saw the first tear spill onto her cheek. My reaction was confusion, but once I saw the document, I promptly understood.

Six years had passed. It was now May, 1946. The war had ended, but it was still a sensitive subject. The newspaper headlines today brought back the painful memories of 1940. We learned such distressing information that day. Starting in 1939, we learned that public health authorities began to encourage local doctors to relay children with any variety of disability to clinics. In reality, the clinics, under the guise of a supportive and convenient infirmary, exterminated every patient who arrived expecting treatment. The most horrifying information that we learned was that they sent fraudulent death certificates to families. For six long years, our family had believed that Henri died from complications from his disease. I never anticipated that the Final Solution would impact our family in this way. I never expected the pain evident in our community. I regret not doing anything to help. My vivid memory of father's decision to ignore those in need will trouble me for years to come. I walked into Henri's old room, and removed his **rag doll from the bed. I took it to my room, and placed it on mine.**

Commented [4]: Did she leave it on his bed? Maybe it is still there? Then she might place it on her own bed?

This is so much more effective! It's almost done!

Works Cited

"Euthanasia Program." *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website*.

<https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005200>

Commented [5]: 987!!!!!!!!!!!!

"The Murder of the Handicapped." *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website*. <https://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007683>

