

Before it Happens Again

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Word Count: 653

*I dug my frostbitten toes under the mud floor of the barrack. Burying my way underground, I prepared for my inevitable fate: death. It was so close that I saw death, tasted death, even heard death. Although my body was dead, my mind was ever alive, and I was keenly cognizant of my surroundings—the stench of the decaying bodies engulfing me, stifling my shallow breath; the relentless wails of the childless mothers burning my frozen ears; my head, bounteous with lice, itching and throbbing unremittingly; the laceration on my left lashed leg oozing with what fluid was left inside me. I fought my eyes to stay awake. Death came to those who slept. As I began to look toward the icy sky, the black ink stain on my arm **A 7630** crept into my view. My starving stomach ached more as I realized that my time in this place might come to an end, but the hatred and discrimination that sent me here would never cease—if they don't remember. I thought about how there was once a time before this hatred when I yearned to write—to tell the stories of my mind. That dream has gone now, dying with me here, under the mud. I sobbed. The tears froze to my withered face and I closed my eyes, finally ready to sleep. Death took over, but I saw the light.*

Gasping for air, I awake from my recurring night terror: my last day at Auschwitz. Trembling in fear, I slowly look down at my legs. Though much older now, my wrinkly left leg has but a faint scar. My toes are pink with life and snug against white comforter instead of the dirty barrack floor. My hair is short and thin, but it does not itch or throb. I check for the branding on my arm but it has now slowly faded to a light grey. I begin to breathe again, for what I see does not frighten me; my body is healthy, albeit old. However, the sounds that race across the room from the television speaker into my aged ears chill me to my core, reverting me to a time of horrifying naiveté. The words referring to people, “These aren’t people. These are animals,” echo in my

ears, which ring louder now than they did when I heard the cries of the childless mothers. My head again begins to throb, my breath becomes shallow, and the televised images of children being ripped out of their mother's arms create a pain in my stomach that resembles the constant ache of starvation from the camp so many years ago. The words, "These aren't people. These are animals," reverberate in my ears once more. These words, carefully crafted, sadistically spun, mold an image in my mind that I cannot neglect. These words, spoken similarly today and so many years ago, were the beginning of my end. The first stain of discrimination on my pure innocence. The first sign of hatred in my loving world. I cannot evade my duty as a survivor to tell my story. To stop the hatred. To end the discrimination. To prevent those babies on the television from being stripped away from their families once more. A pit deep in my stomach urges me to do the unthinkable, to exhume what I had buried so long ago.

I creep out of my bed, turn the volume down on the television that flashes images of children in cages, and pull out my leather bound journal that I brought with me to the United States decades ago. My hand shakes as I pick up the pen to write. But I am a survivor, and I must tell my story before it is too late, before it happens again. I press the black ink onto the yellowed bound paper and carefully scribble the letters constructing the first sentence,

"It all started with words."

Works Cited

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