

# “When Does it End?”

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Our Lady of the Elms

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### When Does it End?

I am running for my life; my heart and legs are aching from exhaustion. German troops are chasing after us and I have to run with my little sister on my back. "Angelika! Angelika!" she cries. "They are coming!" I tell Agnes to be quiet as she squirms and slides down my back. Out of the corner of my eye, I see another German soldier running towards us; although I am running as fast as I can, he reaches us. "Come with me," he says. Without much thought I go with him, Agnes on my back, still squirming.

At that moment I did not think I would see my parents ever again. I was wrong. The German soldier takes Agnes and me to my father's old shop, and there, my father and mother are waiting. Running to our parents, we soon find ourselves in a bone-crushing hug. The German soldier walks over to my father and hands him something in an envelope. My father explains that the soldier has obtained tickets for the St. Louis and that we will be boarding the ship tomorrow. In disbelief, I ask the soldier why he would help us, knowing he could die if caught. In an instant he says, "I just won't get caught."

The day is May 13, 1939; relief floods my body as we leave the port of Hamburg, Germany, and head towards Havana, Cuba. I, along with 936 other passengers, am fortunate to have escaped capture by the Nazis. The attacks against us Jews are becoming more unbearable. Soon my father got all of us visa applications. No matter where we go, we know we are unwanted. The Nazis made this clear to us.

To board the St. Louis, we need to have the "right papers" and pay \$150 per person; it almost seems as if my parents are paying for our death. Life on the ship is difficult; there is no food, no clean water, no doctor on board, and no comfortable bedding. My mother has dysentery and cannot move from her spot on the floor; we have tried to make her as comfortable as

possible. My father cries night and day at the sight of us because we look pitiful, especially my mother. Her skin is washed out, with sullen dark circles under her eyes. Her skin is cool to the touch and it is almost revolting to look at her. I am ashamed because I cannot look at my mother.

The day is May 30, 1939; people are overcome with excitement because they know we are getting close to Cuba, and if Cuba does not let us in, North America definitely will. My mother has recovered her health; I think the excitement of approaching Cuba has given her a burst of energy and has aided in her recovery. The atmosphere on the boat is so intense that no one is complaining about anything; we are just happy to be close to freedom.

I am in agony at being denied entry with my family. My father is trying to stay positive, but I can still see the hurt and anguish in his eyes. It is June 6, 1939 and we have just been denied entry into Havana, Cuba and are being forced to return to Europe from South America; only 28 people were allowed entry. How can they deny us? My younger sister's body is shaking with the thought of being captured and returned to Germany. I am angry at my parents for being Jewish and putting us in this situation.

Life before this was blissful. I came from a good family. I miss when Agnes would force me to ride my bike with her to the lake, and we'd have picnics. Why did all of this have to end because of my religion?

It is June 17, 1939 and we have just docked in Antwerp, Belgium; government officials from Belgium, Holland, France, and the United Kingdom have accepted some of us as refugees. Getting off the ship, I know I am going to be separated from my mother, father, and sister, but it's for the best. My parents and sister have been granted asylum in Holland, and I will be in France. I should be scared that I'm now going to be a 15-year-old by myself, in a new

environment, but I am just happy to be alive. The thought of reuniting with my parents and sister gives me a newfound sense of hope.

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The war is over. I did not stay in France long, as it was not safe. I was lucky to have escaped to England where I have been the past few years. There is not a day that goes by that I do not think about my parents, or my beautiful sister, Agnes. I have adjusted to my new life in England and have found myself a husband. His name is Charles and we have a peaceful life together. And that is what I longed for: Peace. With help, I plan to look for my parents and sister; hope nags me to believe they are alive. But deep down inside of me, I fear they are not.

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The stories of refugees continue. We are haunted by stories of the past, and as we remember Holocaust refugees, survivors, and victims, we ask what stories will come from those who are persecuted today? At the border here in America, parents are being separated from their children. Children of all ages are placed in slum conditions worse than prisons. People are forced into these conditions because they seek a better life, for themselves and their children. When will humanity end hypocrisy? Will we stop separating children from their parents and putting them in dangerous situations. When does it end?

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