

“Blue and White Stripes”  
Written by Lauren Givens  
Second Place, Division II  
Coventry High School  
Carolyn Jacobs, Instructor  
Word count: 978

### “Blue and White Stripes”

My days in Auschwitz seem as though they should be far from my present day life, however, every so often I catch a glimpse of the pattern I dread the most. Blue and white stripes. Even if it's on an everyday object, the ornamentation of colors makes the memories of myself wearing that exact pattern come rushing back like a flash flood. The walls I've built up to try and block out that horrific time come crashing down, and it's as if I'm back in the concentration camp with no one but the strangers around me.

Today, August 27, 1970, I found myself in a quiet supermarket and as I began to peek between aisles and shelves, I saw the sign hanging from the ceiling. I stared at it swaying tauntingly back and forth in the eerie yellow lighting that shone dimly inside of the building, and I suddenly froze in my tracks. My gaze was stuck on the faded blue and white striped pattern illustrated upon the horizontal rectangle, creaking as it swung ever so slightly, and I was transported back 26 years ago to the spring of 1944, when I was just an 18 year old boy.

I could see everything exactly how it was within Auschwitz, for I clearly felt myself go back to 1944, to my first day at Auschwitz-Birkenau. I was no longer in my present day body, but the body of a Jewish boy from years ago, with the determination to survive as a way to not let the Nazis win.

As I look around, The other men scatter around the barrack, blue and white striped fading together, everyone exclaiming how our lives had just recently been spared during the selection. The guards viewed us as valuable to them due to our age and build, which made us capable of forced labor. Although I knew I should feel empathy for those who did not live through the selection, I felt a sense of luck, for the selection had saved me, which was one of the numerous

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causes of my survival.

After months of forced labor, I felt my body getting weaker each day, and as the winter weather grew harsher, my body ached due to the lack of food, and from being overworked. However, the other men and I realized that the guards were frantically trying to get everything out of the camp as fast as possible, whether that be by burning things, killing people, putting death marches in action.

On the night of January 27, 1945, my barrack was forced outside and we were told nothing other than to follow the lead of the guard in front of us. The wind and snow blew ruthlessly as we stepped through the infamous gates of Auschwitz. “Work makes you free.” These words were almost mocking the work we had been put through, for we were not truly given any freedom, and we knew the Nazis had no intent in giving us any.

We began to march all through the night, and most of us felt as though we were going to freeze to death from the freezing temperatures and our thin clothing. All we were allowed to wear was the worn down blue and white striped uniforms that we had been given the first day at the camp. But even though the uniforms were given out of the hands of someone who would rather want us Jews dead than alive, it was the very thing that saved my life.

During the march, yelling, crying, and gunshots filled the air, and in an effort to escape into the dark abyss of the trees around me, I stumbled over a fallen tree branch and split open my leg. My thigh was bleeding profusely, and the amount of blood that surrounded me in the snow looked as though I was shot. The SS Guard that scanned me must have assumed I had died, but as soon as I was out of anyone’s vision, I stripped off my long sleeve blue and white striped shirt,

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and tied it around my thigh to control the bleeding. After I gained the strength to walk again, I went to the only place I knew was around and went back to Auschwitz since we had only travelled about two miles away.

As soon as I got back, there were Soviet troops carrying out both dead bodies and ones that looked dead, but were still hanging on. I couldn't believe the sight of Auschwitz finally being liberated, but I collapsed on the ground before I could take it all in. A Soviet soldier picked me up off the ground in front of the gates and took me to a hospital where I would stay until I looked as though I was human again.

I snap back into reality and realize I am still standing in the middle of a grocery store, but as I begin to walk, a proud feeling spreads throughout myself instead of a timid and careful one. I know that many factors led to my survival, like my determination or the luck of living through the selection. But most of all, I have to remember the torture and pain I went through as I wore those blue in white stripes, since they led me to becoming stronger mentally and physically. I no longer feel as though those blue and white stripes are holding me back, but are allowing me to grow, since they were the thing that ended up saving my life. I now look back at my time at Auschwitz as a time to remember the hard times, but also as a way to be grateful, because in the end, if I did not have those stripes by my side, I would not have been able to survive.

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