

# *Confined by night*

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Blinding rays of light sweep over the barrack.

It is night. The world is blanketed in darkness.

A Nazi spits sharp words at a man.

His eyes cloud with pain as the Nazi strikes his face.

Dark crimson flows from his nose. His screams shatter the silent air.

His only crime was stealing a slice of stale bread.

Before camp, the world was bright; vibrant.

The sun's warm golden embrace never wavered.

The flowers bloomed with pride.

Pollen danced on the wind.

I went to school. I played. I laughed.

I didn't wear the Star of David on my arm like a burden.

Then one night, the world was engulfed by hate and smoke.

Nazis swarmed the streets.

An inferno arose in the synagogues.

Glass littered the ground. Smoke hung in the air.

I was coerced into a truck made for cattle.

Now I sit upon a bed of stiff wooden beams.

I stare at the ink scrawled upon my arm.

The number that has become my identity.

I am a bird trapped in a cage, yearning for flight.

I know now that work will not set me free.

It will only pull me deeper into the pit of despair I grapple for a hold on.

They say the Americans will save us. That their presence is near.

But I cannot listen, for they say other things too.

Things I have learned not to believe.

I have seen too much to accept such lies.

I have watched two executions happen in one day.

I have watched Jews collapse on the ground at roll call, victims of bullets from Nazi guns.

I have watched a mother give birth, only to have her child, fresh and tender, soft and delicate as a petal, only just kissed by life, claimed by death's claws.

I watched the mother give her own life so she could join her infant daughter.

I watched the Nazi's laugh over her corpse.

Anger boiled inside of me, and I felt my cheeks redden such as ripe persimmon does.

Then I saw the icy blue glower of the Nazis.

If I resisted, my own life would be claimed

I wish I could unsee these things, if only for a mere day.

But now, hope is all I can do.

Stale bread and cold soup is all I can eat.

A thin fatigue is all I can wear.

Life is all I can afford.

And so I will not lose it.

A week later, the Americans arrive.

They give us bright smiles filled with sunshine.

They hand us canteens filled with fresh water and food.

Rich chocolate coated nuts. Slices of cold ham and cheese. Freshly plucked berries bursting with juice.

It is all I can do to keep from consuming it all at once.

I am a bird trapped in a cage no longer.

I have been released from my pain.

A soldier guides me to a small room with a shiny mirror.

Thin.

That is the only word I can think of to describe my bony frame.

My ribs seem to pierce my skin, poking out of my chest.

My arms have been replaced by sticks. My fingers by twigs.

My body is brittle and feeble.

Blue circles sag under my eyes.

At camp, we had no mirrors. Food was bland. Work was brutal.

We mined rock from deep within the earth.

We awoke before dawn's golden light shone over the earth.

We were beaten. Sometimes even shot.

I try to tell the Americans all of this, but the words that flow from his mouth are foreign to me, a melody of meaningless sounds. Mine are probably the same to him.

But I don't need words to explain the joy I feel.

It is there on the smile twisted across my face.

In the way my shoulders no longer droop like wilted flowers.

In the brightness of my eyes, which were once dull and desperate; full of an unshakable melancholy.

I am alive. I have survived.

## SOURCES

*Projekt 1065* By Alan Gratz

Photos of outfits worn in Dachau Concentration camp