

“My Greatest Conviction”

Fourth Place, Division I

Written by Leighton Chuna

Copley-Fairlawn Middle School

Jennifer Adair, Instructor

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I wake up and get ready for the day. It's time to go to work as a Nazi soldier, containing the Jewish inside the concentration camps, where they belong.

“You must do everything to keep them from escaping, Zelig. Make their lives as miserable as possible. And if you feel the need to, go ahead and kill them.” I vividly remember Hitler saying this to me. After having a group discussion with about fifty of us, he pulled me aside, telling me these exact words. I took them so seriously because I knew that everything he said was true and the most important thing ever spoken, or at least that's what I thought.

Lately, I've been second guessing myself. I've done everything in my power to follow the commands of Hitler, but there is something that has started to stir inside of me. Maybe what I'm doing isn't right. I'm not exactly sure what is going on, but I don't have peace the same way that I did when this all started.

I dart out the door. I'm late for my shift again. I run as fast as I can to get to my post by the gates into the camp. Luckily, I make it just in time, right before I get yelled at. I trade places with Ritter, who now makes his way back to his quarters to sleep. There I stand on the right side of the gate, where I have always stood. Next to me is Theobald. I give him a weak smile, then return to my duties to make sure that no Jews escape.

I stand there for a few hours, on guard and professional, but inside my mind is racing. Day after day I watch these Jews live their miserable lives in the camp. It continues to pain me more and more as time goes on, witnessing how difficult they have it.

We have taken everything from them. We replaced all of their warm clothing and blankets for the winter with striped pajamas that look so thin it's like they have nothing on at all. Their skin is literally burning from the cold. There are multiple people per bed and only a few toilets for hundreds of people to use. On top of that, we have taken away their access to an education, meaning that the younger children will never get a full understanding of the world around them. To make things even worse, we have rationed them only one hundred and eighty calories per day. I couldn't even survive off of that! And worst of all, there are some guards that shoot people for fun. They think it's a game. And I don't blame them because they think these people aren't really humans. But to have to witness someone close to you suddenly dying because someone else thought it would bring them pleasure, it's torture. To think what something like that would do to your conscience pains me.

Their lives are the worst I've seen by far, but somehow, they still are pulling through. No matter how much we take from them, they still are finding ways to survive. I've heard rumors about them hiding things from us so we wouldn't kill them. Some try to escape through holes in the fence. Who would put their entire life on the line like that for the off chance that they would make it? Their will and determination leaves me in awe. It's amazing to think that they have been through so much, yet there is still this fire inside of them that carries them through the darkest seasons of their lives.

I've got to do something to help the Jews, but I can't. Hitler would kill me if he knew what was going on in my mind right now. I shouldn't be trying to help them! They are worthless, detestable people that deserve this. But when I say that to myself, I don't agree. These people have done nothing wrong. Just because they look a certain way and have a different religion doesn't mean we should be putting them through this pain.

Sadly, I feel helpless. I will never be able to do anything for them because I am only one person. I mean, I could try to get some guards together to help me fight back, but it's too much of a risk to do that. I don't want to be killed the second I speak up, or maybe I do. It's so hard to decide what I need to do because my life's on the line, but it would mean trying to save the lives of the Jews. If only I had their spirit of courage and bravery. Just maybe then would I be able to make the right decision.

Works Cited

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