

The Star that Reunited



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With the small gold star pressed into her palm, Petra shuddered as months of memories, once blocked out, flooded back.

Petra and Seraphina had been best friends back in the sixth grade, they did everything together. However, their families had a twisted past that neither of them knew. The fateful day that their teacher, Ms.Dahlia, had assigned the family tree project, they had to pick a partner and help each other research their family tree. Of course, the two friends picked each other, as in everything. A date was agreed upon and they were to see each other in the library that Tuesday.

Petra sat at a low table in one of the squeaky chairs Tuesday afternoon. After a couple of minutes, a bouncy Seraphina walked in. They pulled up the black chunky computers and started researching. They did their best but could not find everything on the ancestry sites their teacher had recommended. After an hour or so, they found what they were looking for. Petra clicked on a link and after scrolling down, she gasped. Her friend leaned over to see what was wrong. On the screen there was a list of Petra's ancestors alongside a column of their occupations. Next to the name Otto Baur was the occupation: **German soldier, stationed at gas chamber, Auschwitz. Died in 1942, pneumonia.**

Time stopped; the two girls spent several minutes staring at the name. With a shaky finger Seraphina pointed at her own screen. Then it was Petra's turn to lean over. Next to the name of Seraphina's great-grandfather were the words: **Teacher, Berlin. Died in 1924, gas chamber, Auschwitz.** Petra stared at Seraphina and whispered "I'm so sorry." Seraphina sighed, "It's okay I guess." She looked at her hands. "The projects are not due for a week, and I don't

really feel like working anymore." Petra nodded. She did not feel like working anymore either. "Ok, see you tomorrow." With a small wave, Seraphina gathered her things and walked out of the library.

The next day Petra was waiting at her locker like normal. Seraphina walked over with a sober face. "I thought about what I saw yesterday. I think it would be too hard to continue being friends with you knowing what I know now. Petra looked into her friend's saddened face. "I'm so sorry," she murmured. Seraphina stared at her with glazed eyes, and shook her head. "Sorry can't give my great-grandfather back the years that your family took away." She stood up, knocking her backpack against the locker, and stumbled into the crowd, and out of Petra's life for many years.

The next day they did not wait for each other at their lockers or rush to get a seat next to each other. They did not speak to each other. It was as if they had never been friends. Petra cried it all out to her mom one night. "Oh, sweetie." She recalled her mother's voice whispering. "Friends do grow apart sometimes, but this was not for the right reasons. You had nothing to do with this, but you can still fix it." She went and rummaged in a little wooden box that they kept on the shelf; pulling out a small, golden Star of David on a chain. "Your great grandfather, Otto Baur, did terrible things. We need to remember them so we don't repeat them, but that should not change or affect your relationships with people today. It is not fair to you that something that *you had nothing to do with* would break apart *your* friendships. Even though our ancestors did awful things and those impacted will probably never forgive us, we should not hold back our love because of something that happened in the past. The past should make us even more eager to be kind to people and show them that we are different than those who came before us. We should be willing to accept anyone, rich, poor, different

race, religion; anyone. This star was found in the same camp where Seraphina's great-grandfather died, and now that you told me this, it is possible that it belonged to him or one of his friends. You should give it to her." With that, her mom pressed the star into her palm and walked out the door. Unfortunately, the opportunity to speak with Seraphina again never came to pass as she transferred schools shortly thereafter.

Now, years later, Petra knew in her heart that she could not be at peace until things were righted. She had to do it, it did not matter if she was forgiven or not. Pulling out a pen and paper and sitting down hard at her desk, she began to write.

Dear Seraphina,

I doubt you want to remember me. It's Petra. It took me too long to do this so I hope you will forgive me for that, and so much more. I know that you can't forgive my family; I know I haven't forgiven them yet either. But I ask you to stop hating me. What happened between our families was terrible but we should not have let it tear us apart. Also, there is a chance that this belongs to your family and it is high time that you had it.

Love,

Your childhood friend, Petra

Two weeks later Seraphina stood in her kitchen reading the letter. Time had passed, and her heart had settled. Smiling softly with the star pressed in her hand, she wrote a reply.

Petra's heart beat quickly when she pulled the paper out of its envelope. *This is either something that will forever break us apart, or has a chance to pull us back together*, she thought. She hurriedly unfolded the card and read the single line of text.

I forgive you.

Citation

Greene, Joshua, et al. Witness: Voices from the Holocaust. Free Press, 2000.