

“The Burden”
by Jeremy Candelaria
Coventry High School, Grade 9
Mrs. Carolyn Jacobs, Instructor
Word Count: 560

“The Burden ” is a collection of letters sent by Charles Walker, a British soldier, to his younger brothers back home. Charles has two younger brothers. Charles is four years older than Christopher, and Christopher is one year older than Michael. Charles was conscripted on 1, May, 1942 at the age of eighteen. Charles was very eager to join the British army, but Charles would like nothing more than to return home to his family as a hero.

Munich, 17 December, 1944

Dear Brothers,

I am writing to you with a heavy heart because of what I have seen in this war torn land. I have seen living skeletons, men and women so malnourished they sadly look how I would picture beings of myth. My platoon and I are saving hundreds of men, women, and children every few days. What makes my heart feel heavy is that most are still dying even after being saved. What the survivors have gone through is having lasting effects on them both mentally and physically.

Munich, February 12, 1945

Dear Brothers,

I met with a young boy (probably thirteen to fifteen, it was hard to tell because he was so disheveled) who was so happy to see us. He took me to his father who was resting on an old bench in an aged factory. The boy went to wake his father, but the enticingness of death that fluttered in the air like an unrelenting cloud of dust stole his father away. The boy did not even shed a tear. He knew it would happen soon enough. At that moment I felt the unmistakable burden. There were many circumstances that were quite similar. While on a patrol some of my friends came back with the news of a large group of Jewish women. We set out for them immediately. When we finally got there it looked as if a sinful sculptor had created beings in

positions of solitary suffering, together but forever alone. Again I felt that very same distinct burden.

Stuttgart, April 4, 1945

Dear Brothers

Sleep is scarce for most of the men in my platoon. What I do most nights lying awake is think about how to describe this spirit we all have to bear, the *burden*. It is like a stain in the air, a weight on the soul. Whatever it is, it is *always* felt. No one has escaped it. In this peculiar world I am in, it is always over your shoulder. Sometimes you can feel its cold breath on the back of your neck, whispering into your ear.

Stuttgart, May 21, 1945

Dear Brothers,

I have found my soul adjusting to the decrepit environment I am in. Having to carry this burden for so long has sadly made it lighter. I wish I would still get the gut wrenching feeling that I used to. It was ghastly reassuring that I was still human, that my soul was not damaged. Now it is an ordinary day to see living skeletons being nursed back to life, just to die the next day. What is even more normal is to see hundreds of thousands of dead withered bodies freshly killed; murdered. I wish for everyone to understand this burden, how it should be remembered because of the extent of evil from which it came, so it never happens again, never again.

Works Cited

Klein, Gerda W. *All But My Life*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1957.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1958.