

“The Hope Worth Fighting For”

Cam Kucharski

Our Lady of the Elms

Word Count: 939

Is it hope that gives you resistance, or resistance that gives you hope? When we go back in Jewish History, we see how unfairly they were treated. Not until the 20th century were Jews permitted to participate fully in European society (Danks and Rabinsky 11). They were able to get jobs, be in a higher power, and participate in European life. After Hitler's rise to power and the invasion of Poland, harsh, discriminatory laws were inflicted on Jews in Germany and other European countries. Many still lived in the ghettos where they faced illness, starvation, and sometimes death (White). We can ask the question: How did the Jews stay hopeful? During the Holocaust, the Jews were painted as not fitting the "Aryan Myth" created by the Nazis. The Nazi party created the "Final Solution" meaning "You cannot live"(Danks and Rabinsky). In 1933, the first concentration camp called Dachau opened. As more Jews were being taken more camps started to form. From 1933 to 1945, almost 44,000 camps were operating all around Europe (Danks and Rabinsky). The Nazis designed and made camps around train stations. It was a way for soldiers to take the belongings and souls of Jews (White). Many families were taken in this process and many did not know where they were. Some caring people knew the impact this had, as many allowed their homes to become hiding places for Jews (White). This was a form of hope: Hope that people cared and wanted to help. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, Elie Wiesel said: "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." Silence: the word holds great power. When the world doesn't speak up, it gives the tormentor room to attack and silence the victims. Resistance by the Jews and those who helped them endure became a call for action. In the camps, no one knew who would make it out, who would be safe, and who would be chosen to die. Their survival was often sheer luck. The prisoners living in the concentration camps found ways to act. On the trains,

many would sabotage their belongings so the Nazi soldiers couldn't reuse them (White).

Although this may seem small, it was the biggest sign of hope and resistance. To risk their lives to help save another or to sabotage the Nazi plan when they could have been killed is resistance that reveals hope.

In the summer of 2024, my mom took my sister and me to Germany. We got the opportunity to visit Dachau. There we learned all the procedures. When you walk through the camp, you see where the inmates slept, worked, and died. Many parts of the camp were taken down but the walls became memorials for the Jews. It felt rude to take photos as though we were disrespecting all that happened. You could imagine every emotion they felt: Sadness, fear, resilience, uncertainty, and hope for survival. Why would we want to keep such a place like this? These camps no longer exist to eliminate the Jews, but to remember the lives lost. Something so tragic as the Holocaust has to be remembered. The dreams and desires they had are what we remember. Even in today's times, we are not perfect. We still discriminate against others and treat them as if they don't belong. We are failing ourselves, but most importantly, we fail the victims and survivors.

The first transport of women to Auschwitz should not be forgotten. Once they reached the camp, they were assigned a prison number, but the most shocking fact was they were forced to change their names (Macadam 16) Their identities were stolen. Many women with children had to make a life altering decision: Would they enter the camp with their children? Most children were killed once they reached the camps. Some were given to grandmothers. Women

who baked made recipes for their children to know what life was before the war. They made a cookbook for

future generations - a cookbook for hope (White). Women giving up their children and thinking of generations to come with recipes was their resistance. Sometimes resistance doesn't mean fighting back. It can mean to sit in unending pain. Which form of resistance is the strongest? I think it depends on the person. Everyone has a story, a battle, or a dream. The Jews were no different. After people saw what was truly happening in Europe, there was a national resistance, but why did it have to take the lives of so many for other nations to finally intervene? On April 11, 1945 the United States army liberated Buchenwald (Danks and Rabinsky). They were able to see some survivors. One was Elie Wiesel, who managed to reclaim his Jewish faith and write acclaimed books about his experience. He and many others managed to move on. Not everyone was able to have that life, and when the U.S soldiers walked through the camps, they saw the real truth: Bodies starved, gassed, and killed. Were their silent cries the opening they needed? We have the saying, "History always repeats itself." When will we learn to stop repeating this horror? Yet with every terrible story, hope can always be found. Elie Wiesel became an activist for peace, peace in the Jewish community (Danks and Rabinsky). He saw the importance of spreading the Jewish faith. We should give people impacted by the Holocaust the world they deserve. Within every single one of them, there was hope and resistance. You have to have hope to have resistance, and without hope, what are you fighting for?

Works Cited

Danks, Carol, and Leatrice B. Rabinsky. *The Holocaust: Prejudice Unleashed*. State of Ohio, 1989.

Macadam, Heather Dune, and Caroline Moorehead. *999: The Extraordinary Young Women of the First Official Jewish Transport to Auschwitz*. New York, Citadel Press Books, 2020.

White, Barb. "Holocaust and Genocide: The Importance of Hope and Resistance." 09 January 2026, Our Lady of the Elms, Akron, OH.

Wiesel, Elie. *Acceptance Speech for the Nobel Peace Prize*. Nobel Peace Prize.

Wood, Angela, and Steven Spielberg. *Holocaust: The Events and Their Impact on Real People*. New York, Ny, Dk Publishing, 2007.