

Honorable Mention

Division I – Writing

Ayla Nakicevic, Grade 8

Revere Middle School

The Journalist

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The Journalist

"They threw us into cattle cars...There was no room to sit, no air to breathe. We were no longer treated as people." I sat in my office, unable to speak, unable to move. The biting words forced an intense, unexplainable sensation to come over me. How could this truly be someone's life? How could a human possibly endure such suffering, such agony, yet live to tell the tale? I sat for hours, the voice replaying in my head, wondering how humans could do such a thing to one another, wondering why I had posted that sign all those weeks ago.

As journalists, we are taught in school how to remain impartial when writing a story. We are taught not to involve ourselves with people we take accounts from. Most importantly, we are taught not to allow emotions into our writing. When I approached my local synagogue, poster in hand, I had the goal of presenting facts about the Holocaust, giving a simple rundown of the situation in Europe, and possibly including some testimonies for my audience. I asked if anyone could share their family's experience with the Holocaust, and if they would be willing to speak to me; that day, I received an anonymous tape in my mailbox. Now, at that moment, all I could think about was the millions of people and how each one of them had their own gruesome stories about how they were starved or beaten or stripped from their families without so much as a goodbye.

That was almost a year ago now. Every single day since then, I have walked into my office and stared at the tape. I could never bring myself to hit play on the recording once more, yet I could never put the thing away. That is, until one day. For whatever reason, I could not stop myself from gazing over at the play button; I was overcome with temptation. I picked up right where I had left off, and the same familiar voice continued once again. "We were just cargo to be moved and discarded." I fought the urge not to stop the voice, stop the noise, and forever forget. "No," I told myself, "you have to go on and listen. If you do not, no one ever may." I persisted and continued to listen to the gentle words. "I stayed alive because of my mother. We looked at each other and we knew: we cannot give up. Our resistance was our bond. As long as we were together, they hadn't taken everything."

In that very moment, a profound realization washed over me: these people had never once thought about giving in to the oppression they faced every single day. These people had never once wished that they were not Jewish. These people celebrated their culture and their religion together, even though it was the very reason they were all on the brink of death. This recognition led me to seek out even more testimonies. I listened to another recording from the same woman, Erika Gold, I later found out. "We didn't have any water, we didn't have any food... The smell was unbearable. You lose your identity when you are

treated this way. You are no longer Erika, you are just a thing they want to get rid of.” From another woman, Erna Anolik: “When we first came to Auschwitz,...we were marched to an area where they shaved our heads. We were undressed and given gray dresses, no underwear, just a gray dress and wooden shoes...We were never assigned any work. But I remember I volunteered to go and pick up the coffee or bread, whatever there was, to another camp because I always thought that maybe I’ll see my parents.” From then on, I knew that these people were among the most resilient, indomitable humans the world would ever encounter.

5 years later

Today is the day I have finally finished my soon-to-be-published journal. It is an ode to those who were beyond brave in the face of one of the most obscene, immoral leaders and times. I have learned through my writing that the Jewish people of the Holocaust were truly like phoenixes rising from the ashes; they got back up time after time, even when they were beaten down so horrifically. I am, too, forever grateful that I posted that sign all those years ago. I hope that I have done these valiant people justice, and I hope that the world will never again be a breeding ground for such hate ever again.

Works Cited

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