

Honorable Mention

Division I – Writing

Henry Burke, Grade 8

Revere Middle School

Tree of Tragedy

Word Count 328

Tree of Tragedy

On a bright, sunny day, with birds chirping, frost-covered grass glistening in the cool, winter sun, and snowflakes slowly drifting down from the clouds above, the peacefulness is quickly halted by the sound of yelling men. As the men slowly walk along the trail, I get a better look at them—it's the Nazis. They are leading their victims on a death march.

I watch as they slowly trudge along the trail. The Jews look helpless, yet some are still attempting to make an escape. I watch as a young girl—no older than 18—sprints away from the group. She's shot almost instantly. More and more attempt to escape. The once pristine white snow now has red patches everywhere. Two girls run behind my large wood body in an attempt to escape the brutality. What's left of my leaves fall on their heads. They believed they had gotten away from it, however their hope was short lived. A Nazi guard spotted one of them sticking out from behind me and forcefully dragged them back to the trail where they would later be executed.

It seemed like they were passing for hours. It was a never-ending parade of prisoners. The instant, crushing silence after each gunshot was deafening. Even the birds, who were chirping away only a little while ago, had gone silent because of the brutality. In the heat of the situation I wish I could help. Help all the victims escape, help save the girls who hid behind me. Yet I am rooted firmly in the ground, unable to do anything—forced to witness the horror.

The last of them had finally passed by. The entire thing had felt like a fever dream—like it couldn't actually be happening in front of me. A few days later I could stand no more and toppled into the same path they had walked on a few days ago. The march had not only crushed the prisoners—it broke those who had to witness it.

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