

Honorable Mention

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Until That Day Comes

Anne Frank once said, "I simply cannot build my hopes on a foundation of confusion, misery, and death...I think...peace and tranquility will return again." She held onto the idea that one day, in spite of all the horrific events at the time, that the world would overcome this warfare that is now known as the Holocaust. Unfortunately, the world has not completely overcome genocide because it still exists in today's society. A genocide is an intentional systematic destruction of a specific group of people (History.com Staff). Anne Frank was just one of six million Jewish people murdered during the time of World War II; this genocide, the Holocaust, was led by Adolf Hitler (History.com Staff). With six million dead, the ones that remained alive were miracles. Some very special survivors of the Holocaust are Aaron Elster, who I had the opportunity to meet, and Alice Herz-Sommer. Aaron Elster was born in 1933 in Sokolow-Podlaski, Poland. He was just seven years old when the war hit. At ten years old Aaron escaped the ghetto and hid in an attic, which he referred to as his "safe haven," of a Polish family his mom knew and stayed in there until the war ended (*Power of One Survivor Story*). Even to this day, I still remember the vivid descriptions while hearing his speech. Another survivor by the name of Alice Sommer was known for her inspiration. Alice was born in 1903 in Prague, Czech Republic where she was taken to Theresienstadt concentration camp. She was an amazing pianist and music teacher and spread joy in the camp playing music she had memorized for everyone. Alice, living up to 110 years old, makes herself the longest living Holocaust survivor (Fox). Through the heart-touching stories of Aaron Elster and Alice Sommer, important lessons can be learned to prevent future genocide.

To begin with, one of the key lessons from Aaron Elster on preventing genocide today is to not be a follower and stand up for people. By being a follower, one is allowing someone else to take control of any situation. Many people do not understand the dangers of that “complete control” outcome. At an education center, Aaron shared, “Unfortunately, the deniers, the haters, are still here and spewing out hate, [...] they're here and they're growing, don't be a bystander” (Correspondent, WILLIAMS Times). Aaron explains that it is important to stand up for people and not be a bystander because prejudice and hate spread and can make a society toxic, dangerous, and harmful. Giving just one person too much power can lead an individual to becoming a dictator, a controlling society, and possibly lead to events just like the Holocaust. The rest of Hitler’s inner circle was filled with men who idolized him. He wanted people to follow him blindly, yet were smart enough to carry out his orders (Altman 34). In order to not repeat history, learning from the past and listening to survivors like Aaron Elster, and taking a stand are ways to prevent genocide. Aaron Elster also stated that, “...a whole new world of young people and adults will understand what people are capable of doing to one another, and that it just takes a little bit of goodness from each person to help change the world for the better” (Billock). Humans do not always have that “goodness” he speaks about. They can be cruel, get inside the heads of other people, and use society’s weaknesses to execute their own agendas, just like Hitler. Aaron’s town was corrupted by soldiers who turned his town into a ghetto and added barbed wire around it. The people who lived there were forced to flee their homes and line up against a wall so that they can all be taken to camps. It broke Aaron’s heart to see someone especially as young as his sister have to go through an event like this where people just come in and think they have the power to takeover and treat others so poorly (*Power of One Survivor*

Story). It is important to understand right from wrong. It is important to know how these dictators gain power and how they keep it in order to help people to not be influenced by evil dictators. For this reason, standing up against leaders that implement evil will never allow horrific events like the Holocaust a chance to happen again.

In addition to Aaron's lesson, Alice Sommer's sensational lesson of learning to understand from past mistakes also remains current. Alice's story is an inspiration and never ceases to impact others. She soaks up the beauty in life and surrounds herself with positive thoughts rather than hate. Alice stated in one of her famous quotes, "Don't stand there and cry. Understand" ("Stoessinger"). This quote demonstrates one of her lessons that understanding is the substructure of serenity. Unity is crucial to a peaceful and serene society. Together, people need to accept that not every person is the same. America especially, is known for diverse cultures, races, ethnicities, sexual orientation and so much more. America can set an example for other countries to be accepting, loving, and supportive of all humans, despite the differences. By understanding one another, genocide prevention will expand. Furthermore, another example of this is in a famous quote from her book, "Hatred eats the soul of the hater, not the hated" ("Alice Herz-Sommer"). Alice believes that hate destroys the person who is full of it, so in order to be at peace, the key is to keep hate out of the heart. Continuing to hate on the mistakes of others leads to more setbacks than improvements. Hating does not help someone grow, it helps someone stay bitter. Instead, it is important to learn from these mistakes so that events similar to this cannot occur again. Life is full of opportunities and teaches people lessons everyday. By staying educated and continuing to learn from past mistakes, the world can be better and societies can unite.

As shown above, Alice and Aaron have overcome tragic experiences during the Holocaust. Both survivors have lost family members and have struggled during these sickening times. Their differences go far beyond their ages and experiences during the camps. Aaron Elster, at such a young age was stuck for three years hiding in an attic until the war ended. Alice Herz-Sommer stayed in a camp playing music for others and enjoying life for what it was. Aaron explains, "I cannot conceive a God that would allow the slaughter of little children and stand by watching" ("Lincolnshire Resident Tells His Holocaust Story"). Aaron never understood how a God can allow something as atrocious as the Holocaust to happen. He had trouble connecting in his relationship with God. Going through traumatic experiences and coping with war at such a young age is difficult for a young boy to process. Overall, Aaron did not allow his past to defeat him forever and now spreads awareness to young people about genocide. He has also come to peace with God. Alice differs from this because she was able to cope and accept everything faster than Aaron: One of her beautiful quotes, "...I have lived through many wars and have lost everything many times- including my husband, mother, and my beloved son. Yet, life is beautiful and I have so much to learn and enjoy" (Reuters). She never looked at the negative side of situations, even though she was aware of this destructive genocide. Alice is conscious of the tragedies she had to go through in life, such as losing her son. Anyhow, she still believed that life was beautiful and enjoyed the beauty in what was left. Alice never got mad or felt sorry for herself because all she did was focus on the good. She stayed strong and got through it, without one bit of hate. Regardless of their stories, the lessons from the both of them are still relevant today. Both survivors understand the dangers of prejudice and know it is wrong to hate based on differences. Aaron teaches that it is important to be an upstander and stand up against leaders

who implement complete power and evil, while Alice teaches to learn to understand from one another's mistakes and to get along and build one, strong, stable society. Both lessons were learned differently, however they are valid ways in preventing genocide and teaching future generations more about it.

In conclusion, one can learn many worthy lessons on preventing genocide from the survivor stories of Aaron Elster and Alice-Herz Sommer. The both of them spread awareness on the dangers of prejudice and hate, while one believes it is important to be an upstander, and one believes in to understanding people and forgiving their mistakes. The experiences these people lived through have impacted their knowledge on such tragedies and can teach others how to prevent it from happening again. Just as Anne Frank said, maybe just one day, the peace and tranquility the world once had will come back.

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