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“Never Shall I Forget”

“While my people were being burned past recognition, Nazi officials were able to take a bath. Allowing themselves the sweet bliss of relaxation to drown out the sounds of crackling fire filled with burning bodies. Human ashes everywhere. A cup of ash per person” (Oster). This quote, both powerful and disturbing, comes from an interview with a family member of mine named Rachel Oster. In 2016 she went on a religious mission to deepen her knowledge of her Jewish culture, and here writes about her visit to the Polish concentration camp, Lublin. She makes a point to mention that the Nazi officials, who were torturing innocent human beings, were allowed human qualities as simple as taking a bath, while their Jewish captives were being killed, starved and tortured by their German colleagues without any second thoughts. Genocide brings forth plenty of stories from survivors who have been lucky enough to overcome their hardships. Each individual survivor of the Holocaust has his or her own unique story with its own unique lesson to share to anyone listening. Their pain and suffering was brought forth by heartless Nazi soldiers hypnotized by a leader who believed the Jews were to blame for everything wrong in the world. Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and author, recalls his experiences from beginning to end in the novel, *Night*. He is an incredible advocate for life and believes that the horror of the Holocaust should never be forgotten. Another notable survivor is Robert Clary, who turned his perseverance from the Holocaust into a successful acting career. Wiesel and Clary have very similar narratives of their time in the Buchenwald concentration

camp, but very different aspects of innocence. They each fought for different reasons to stay alive and each turned their past into an even brighter future. Listening and learning from these men will help lead to an end to further mass killings such as the Holocaust.

First of all, every survivor story of the Holocaust has a different lesson, each showing the brutal, inhumane nature of human beings. Whether the story tells the viewer of the choices they were forced to make, the violent nature of the opposing hand, or of the unsettling surroundings, each story shows the world why it needs to say, “never again”. For example, in the autobiography *Night*, the author, Elie Wiesel, tells his journey of turning from an average Jewish boy, to a slave of the German army. In the novel it states, “‘Faster! Faster! Move you lazy good-for-nothings!’ The Hungarian police were screaming. That was when I began to hate them, and my hatred remains our only link today. They were the first faces of hell and death” (Wiesel 19). From this quote, the readers can experience empathy for the human beings being effected. After just being taken from their ghettos, the men, women and children were being forced to run so the policemen did not have to wait. They were forced to use up all of their energy needed for the long journey ahead. Another survivor of the Holocaust, Robert Clary, has similar stories to tell of the mistreatment by the brainwashed policemen. Sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp, Clary states that he thought he first eight days there would be his last. During an interview he recalls, “When we got to Buchenwald, the SS shoved us into a shower room to spend the night....The first eight days there, the Germans kept us without a crumb to eat. We were hanging on to life by pure guts” (Hahn). Continuing the theme of inhumanity, the quote shows the brutal conditions plagued upon his people. Not even a word was spoken between them and there was already a mutual hatred held between helpless Jews and soldiers brainwashed by the upper hand.

The meaningless hatred between them destroyed millions of lives, because the empathy was lost. In both instances, Clary and Wiesel describe their experiences with the Nazi police in ways that are unacceptable. All empathy was completely absent from every German soldier's heart during this time, but had that been different, millions of lives could have been saved.

Furthermore, while both survivor stories highlight stories of aggression, the ways Wiesel and Clary accepted their experiences are very different. As Wiesel recalled in his novel *Night*, he fought to stay alive at Auschwitz for his father. In the novel it states, "His voice was terribly sad. I understood that he did not wish to see what they would do to me. He did not wish to see his only son go up in flames" (Wiesel 55). From this quote the reader can interpret that although Wiesel's father was blessed with his son's presence in the camp, it did not bring him happiness. He knew that entering the camp was the beginning of new kinds of suffering and the fact that his son was with him only meant additional suffering because he will have to witness all of his son's pain. However, Robert Clary had a different point of view about his stay at Buchenwald despite being older than Wiesel. He let love fuel his mission and spent everyday pushing to make it to the light at the end of the tunnel. Many of the people banished to the camps did not have anything to guide them to this same fire, even their religion was taken from them after public humiliation. Faith can lead someone through the darkest of times, and so many of the Jews were lucky enough to still be inspired by the scripture and stayed alive for the greater good after being shamed for believing in something. In Clary's case, he held on to his innocence for survival. During a post war interview, he had this to say, "Singing, entertaining, and being in kind of good health at my age, that's why I survived. I was very immature and young and not really fully realizing what situation I was involved with ... I don't know if I would have survived if I really

knew that” (Flax). He shows here that by maintaining the hope and innocence he had before he was captured, he was able to live through anything that came in his way because he didn’t fully understand. He performed for his fellow prisoners to give them the sense of normality, as opposed to the alienation they had become used to. Some people believe that they know how they would react if they had been forced to endure Nazi persecution, many believing that they would maintain their composure. Many of the Jews at the time believed they could remain calm and collected while in the camps, but after being exploited to the public for their beliefs, treated as dogs, starved and tortured, there is no way to feel human while being exposed to such insanity. The hell that those people went through is unimaginable, and there is no way to possibly conceptualize the pain and suffering.

Finally, by learning about genocide and the terror it reigns upon races, families and bystanders alike, it can in turn better the future from the lessons learned. Genocide is a topic anyone can learn from, and once again Elie Wiesel has a beautiful quote to depict his heartbreaking memories from his time in hell. In a poem entitled “Never Shall I Forget”, Wiesel states, “Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky” (Wiesel 32). No one should ever forget a tragedy such as the Holocaust. Some people all over the world still have nightmares at night remembering the pain inflicted upon them and their fellow men. Resilience is a quality that made both Elie Wiesel and Robert Clary move on from their darkness to become the successful men they are noted to be. Both men were transported to the same camp and each endeavored the same amount of losses whether it was a family member, friend or sanity. In a biography written about Clary it says, “He likens his time in Nazi concentration camps as a pure

nightmare due to how he was treated and what he had to resort to in order to survive. Dreams about his experience still haunt him.” (Harvey). From this quote the reader can interpret that the now 90 year old survivor can never overcome the memories of his struggle. It is impossible to escape from the flashbacks that haunt them to this day, no matter the amount of time it will never heal them of their pain. Looking at all the permanent scars left with thousands of people and realizing mistakes is another way empathy can change the world for the better. Understanding what they went through is one step closer to moving farther away from ever coming close to annihilating thousands of people again.

In conclusion, empathy is a quality that is necessary in every heart of every human being. With the ability to put oneself in another’s shoes, being able to understand a survivor's story and feel for them will help prevent anything like the Holocaust to happen ever again. By paying attention to the signs and choosing the correct person to lead the country, everyone can feel safe in his or her own shoes. No one should ever have to suffer like the Jews did during World War II. The world is working on becoming an advocate for prevention of genocide by learning from past events. From listening to survivors such as Elie Wiesel and Robert Clary, anyone can understand their stories, wince at the pain inflicted upon them, and learn from the mistakes of the Nazi leaders. Anyone can have empathy for their stories of mistreatment by the SS from being forced to working labor camps to being fed crumbs as meals. Thinking of the dreams the heartbroken survivors jolting awake at night after nightmares of the camps could give any reasonable person the chills. Denying simple human qualities such as having a home, a religion, and even walking outside are the first signs of a problem, and can never be ignored. In order for a nation to say, “never again”, in reference to a genocide it needs to put in efforts to show why it

should never happen ever again. Teaching how to have empathy will effectively show students, teachers, and people, how to understand what someone else is going through and show them the way to help them out of their situation. If someone is being granted simple human rights while other people are being killed in ways that are unimaginable then there is something seriously wrong. There were not even ashes for some people to have as a memory of their loved ones that were burned passed recognition. In the end, all of the world has to say is, never again.

#### Works Cited

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