

"When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle."

-Edmund Burke

I will not lie. For much of my life I did not consider myself to be linked to the spiraling and twisted story of the Holocaust and World War II. My heritage and name are Dutch, I am not Jewish, I believed I had no connection to that black spot of history. I sympathized, yes, I shook my head at such injustice, but my history was separate.

My family came to America from a small village called Putten, in the Netherlands. I knew that the town was resentful towards the Nazis, but I did not know that some of my ancestors played key roles in Nazi resistance. I did not know that on the first and second days of October, 1944, because of such resistance, all the men in the village between ages 18 and 50 were transported to concentration camps. I did not know that the rest of the village was forced to leave as the Nazis burned their homes. I did not know that out of the 660 men taken, 554 died in concentration camps. I did not know that only 44 men returned safely to Putten after liberation (Oktober 44 Foundation). I simply did not know.

My ignorance was my buffer; because I did not realize how far reaching the effects of the Holocaust were I failed to comprehend its magnitude. How deadly is ignorance, how cruel. If we don't remember and study the plights of the generations before us, we have failed, for then we let history repeat its cruel pattern.

Time eats away at our memory, turning faces into nothing more than numerals. During World War II approximately 1,000,000 Jews died in the Soviet Union, 140,000 in Germany, and almost 3,000,000 in Poland; along with millions of others all over Europe (Brinkley, 410). Are those just numbers on a piece of paper, or did they not each have hopes and dreams like we do today? Time forces us to merge the numbers and the souls; we become jaded and negligent. Once they become numbers in a history book, the victims of the Holocaust stop being people.

Numbers have their own power. They use their magnitude to influence and exemplify, but they can also distract from the real source of a tragedy. Our generation is in danger of not being concerned about a massacre unless there is a required number of lives lost. The goal of the Nazis was to dehumanize their victims, and we are slowly letting time achieve that same goal. Time numbs us. The Holocaust, the Nazis, the War; we are letting all of it become either a menial grade on a test paper, or a swift punchline to a whispered joke. We fail to realize that this is not some dull history lesson, this is life. The Holocaust is what we fail to if we are too lazy to even think for ourselves.

These were entire families murdered, even the smallest of infants, because of their identity or convictions. The victims of the Holocaust were not soldiers; they were not persecuted because they had a substantial amount of leverage in the political fields of Europe. The Nazis succeeded in convincing the masses that an innocent people were an evil race, destined to be wiped out. They convinced not just armies or political allies, but the people themselves. People like you and I today, who sit in our comfortable safe homes, watch and read the news, and digest the most horrific extremities of the world with a bored indifference.

Voltaire once said, "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." Hitler knew how to influence those who heard his speeches. His addresses showed, "Natural gifts for acting [that] helped him manipulate the emotions of an audience...Multitudes were swayed by his oratory." (Shirer 86) Entire factions of Europe were brainwashed. They clung to whatever lie or truth their rulers would tell them; resulting in a widespread, unreasonable hate for the Jews and other unfavored classes of people.

Brainwashing of the masses can still occur today, it may be even more feasible with the aid of all the technological resources that we have. Jeopardy and persecution will be options if we do not teach ourselves to form individual views and have the reasoning to uphold them. A solid worldview can be the answer to preventing another crime against humanity in years to come. Francis Bacon wrote more than three hundred years before the ignorance of the Holocaust "Knowledge is power." We all

know this, it is a common saying; plastered in our schools and libraries, but if we can't recognize the *value* of being informed we are lost.

As the new generation we must avoid becoming easily imposed on, in order to protect ourselves and our descendants. Not only must we remember the Holocaust, but we must remember the path that brought us to such atrocities. It is essential that I do *not* forget the village of Putten; absolutely necessary that I remember that my grandfather should have been one of those men taken had he not moved to America. If I forget I may as well shrug my shoulders and give my approval for it to happen again.

We are capable of a second Holocaust, it is foolish to think otherwise. Yesterday we had Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini, and Adolf Hitler; today we have Kim Jon II, Fidel Castro, and Omar Al-Bashir. Pictures of children from Darfur mirror those taken at concentration camps, slavery and torture are still a part of reality. Even America, our country that guarantees equal rights to each man, reported 9,691 victims of hate crimes in 2008 alone (US. Federal Bureau of Investigation).

Cruelty is embedded in man's nature, a small seed of hate that we all carry within. It is whether or not we act on that hate that defines us. The best way to aid such hate is to remain silent, to become passive and ignorant. As Elie Wiesel once said "In a way, to be indifferent to that suffering is what makes the human being inhuman. Indifference, after all, is more dangerous than anger and hatred." Our duty to mankind is to rise to action, to carry out acts of compassion in order to preserve the good that is still in this world.

Today, Putten is still small, and life continues on. But today, in the middle of the town there lies a small garden, at the center of which stands the statue of a woman. On the first and second day of October every year flowers are brought to this monument, and the town takes these days to remember. They do not forget, they refuse to forget. They remember the men, they remember the Jews they hid in their homes, they remember why they resisted.

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