

The Void of Indifference
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Slam! Bodies hit up against the locker, and the rattling echoed across the hall. The familiar face of my tormentor threw his head back and laughed. He spat cuss words at me, until I could literally feel the spray of his saliva up against my skin. When he let go of my shirt collar, I cowered up against the locker, clinging to his every word. Everything he said was true, or at least, I believed it. Still laughing, he turned away, shaking his head and laughing as he walked out the door.

In this scenario, no one came and helped the tormented. People might have seen it, yet chose to ignore it for fear that it might have caused them harm. People said, "Well, I'm just glad it isn't me. It stinks being him, but I didn't really know him well, anyway," then continued through the hallway, back into the void of indifference. People turn their heads in another direction, ignoring the fact that another human being is being tormented, put down for inane, superficial things and yet, deciding that "since it isn't me, I'll just let it alone." I disagree. When ever another human being is being bullied, someone needs to stand up, needs to help out. No one should be made to feel like they're a caged animal, trapped to feel the same way every day.

In the Holocaust, eleven million people were killed by the most infamous bullies in history, people who believed that a white, "Aryan" race was supreme and all others must step aside; even exterminated like pests! These were the Nazis, who tormented their "subordinates" every day, forcing them to work until they could no longer stand; even thrown into the crematoria ... not a thought to honor their existence, human or otherwise. The reasons were as stupid as, "he is African-American ... a Jew, a Jew-lover, a Gypsy, he's gay!" The ironic sign, *arbeit macht frei* (work will set you free), was hung in the entryway of several concentration and death camps. The Nazis killed six million Jews between 1939-1945. The Holocaust persisted like a black plague for six years, before it was finally put to an end.

"If only we creatures had stuck together, it could have been different..." (*Terrible Things*, by Eve Bunting). Everybody has their thoughts, feelings, hopes, dreams, fears, wants. No one is really all that different from anyone else, and no one deserves to live anymore than anyone else. Not one person is one iota better than another, so why do so many seem to think so? People claim to believe this, but when it comes time to prove it by standing up for someone, they turn their heads elsewhere, ignoring the cries for help ... "not my problem!" People shouldn't need to even ask, because bullying, in what ever form, must not be tolerated. Sadly, it is permitted, typically because people are too often cowardly to actually

help someone in crisis. When ever someone is in pain, or their security is questioned, whether or not people will step in shouldn't even be questioned.

*"Someone once asked me, 'what is your favorite commandment?,' and I said, 'thou shalt not stand idly by.' (Elie Wiesel, author of countless books including *Night*, Holocaust survivor, and Nobel Peace Prize winner).*

People need to step forward. Empathy is ignored, whereas it should be as inherent to living as is breathing. Never should a fellow human being have to feel insecure, terrified for being who they are. Standing idly by, watching people being bullied, that is worse than doing the evil itself. We must learn from history and stand up for what is right and against what is wrong. The time has long since passed to stop watching, to stop bullying. Unless it's fighting to stop bullying, we should fight no more.

Learning about the Holocaust has changed my views on so many things, and hatred and bullying has taken far more disturbing shape in my mind. My generation must be the one that actively eradicates hatred and intolerance of others. There must be no such thing as an "innocent" bystander. I'll stand up and help lead the fight against bullying. This is how the story must end, so that freedom and living really mean what we *think* they do.

Slam! I'm smashed into the locker. The rattling echoes across the room. The familiar face of my tormentor throws his head back and laughs. The bully spat cuss words at me, until I could feel the spray of saliva in my face. "Back off," a voice says as if heaven-sent.

Instantly, the bully turns, confronting him. An argument ensues, as the tormentor tries to prove my worthlessness to my savior. He doesn't, but the altercation is halted; the bully forced away. "Are you alright?" I nod ... unable to fully express my appreciation ... beyond words.

Resources

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1. Terrible Things, Eve Bunting
2. Night, Elie Wiesel