

W3-91

Holocaust Writing Contest 2011

***Bully:** an aggressive person who intimidates or mistreats those weaker than them.*

In museums they break down the Holocaust by date, by country, by severity, by bags of hair. Broken down into broken beds and empty gas pellets. How small do we have to make it to be able to understand?

I wonder if the bodies know that they have become statistics. There are still no precise estimates for the exact number of people who were lost in the Holocaust. Instead we have amputated families with no roots back to their ancestors. There is no one to remember the way back to the past. It is arrogant to believe we can feel any more than a fraction of this tragedy by looking at seas of shoes left behind and pictures of strangers before they were killed. It is arrogant to believe that one person's mind can hold so many dead. So we break it down.

In a society where tragedies such as the Holocaust are allowed to happen everyone has the potential to be a bully. It's surprising how often people fulfill their potential when hate is the easiest option.

Bullying on the scale of the Holocaust is an inevitable manifestation of a larger societal problem. The more people see a particular group being bullied, the more they come to believe that the people in that group deserve it. Hitler understood and manipulated the power of repetition. He discovered a universal truth about the masses: "Make the lie big, make it simple, keep saying it, and eventually they will believe it." When individuals in a hated group start disappearing, the general populous doesn't question it. The more times we reinforce stereotypes, the easier it is to take them as truth. Even for people who are already socially conscious and aware of civil rights issues. Although our intentions may be good, it's the results of our actions that actually matter.

My first reaction to the Holocaust was sadness. When I realized how much work was put into making it happen, my sadness turned to disgust. The Holocaust was not an accident. It was built on centuries of Anti-Semitism and violence in Europe. The Jews were portrayed by fearful Christians as baby-eating monsters for so long that many people came to believe all these rumors were fact. Martin Luther, the creator of the Lutheran Church, wrote an entire book about the plague that was Judaism. When the Nazis chose this religious faction to target Anti-Semitism was already accepted in society.

During World War II the Jewish population of America was informed of the atrocities taking place in Germany. American newspapers reported Nazi activities to the American public but it was decided by the American government that it was better not to intervene. This indifference is another symptom of practiced bigotry.

When hate becomes indifference it develops into something bigger than bullying. In Germany in the late 1930's, a man could get sent to a concentration camp for implied homosexuality. Any contact with a person of the same gender could be blown up into a warrant for arrest. Conditions in concentration camps were worse for the gays than for any group, except the Jews. This stemmed from the guards and concentration camp victims' societal fear of homosexuality. Homosexuals were bullied by other inmates. Homosexuals were also forced to do the hardest work and to perform sexual acts with lieutenants for food. The experience of the concentration camp still couldn't overwhelm the hate for homosexuals that many people of that time possessed. Even today there is less respect for homosexuals affected by the Holocaust than other minority groups. Gays were not pardoned for the "criminal" offense of homosexuality until 2002. We haven't learned from our mistakes yet.

Think about how many people it took to make a Holocaust. Every person who perpetuated prejudice in Europe contributed to the suffering of millions of people. How dare we be so suicidal? I want to stop looking at the past because change does not happen by feeling guilty. Today there are still genocides. I refuse to participate in the self-destructive pattern of accepting hatred as fact.

Learning about the Holocaust has changed my perspective on humanity's capacity for inaction in the face of brutality. Today's youth are educated in the mistakes of the past but not

on the opportunities to change the future. Our history should be a tool for self-reflection, not a tool for change. Our tools for change are taking action in today's problems. When lamenting the actions we could have taken 70 years ago we are instead repeating past mistakes. There is no point in thinking about what we would have done. I am a gay fifteen-year-old agitator. If I had been in the holocaust I most likely would be dead right now. Instead I focus on what I could do. I am a fifteen-year-old photojournalist. I am going to make pain so blindingly beautiful that you won't be able to look away. We need to learn from our mistakes today. Let me show you.

Primary Resource: www.ushmm.org