

Break

“Sometimes they trip you and you fall. When they laugh, you think maybe you had a stupid expression on your face as you fell or maybe someone said something funny that you missed. Sometimes you laugh with them, because after all, someone falling flat on their face is kinda funny, right? Sure.” (Odoneout, *Imagine This*).

This is how it starts: small. Bullying. A form of abuse: involving repeated acts over time attempting to create or enforce one person's (or group's) power over another person (or group) (Wikipedia, *Bullying*).

Recently, I have learned the going-ons of one of the most tragic events ever, The Shoah. Through this learning I have derived some profound insights into not only myself, but others. My French III class examined acts of the Holocaust and discussed them at length. These exercises changed me, forever. They provided a collective experience that was incredibly valuable in changing my view on a variety of things: the role of bystanders, empathy, the magnitude of little things, and how to react. Therefore, studying the Holocaust has altered my perception and reaction to bullying, which is now focused on both recognizing and stopping bullying.

The first thing we discussed about the Holocaust was the string of continuous discriminatory acts against the Jews. It was a pivotal moment for me. Before then, I had perceived the Holocaust as a random act of sorts - an event without roots before it. I was wrong. I learned that bigotry against Jews had been happening for centuries. It started in 70 A.D. and continued building and building and building. This genealogy of Jewish hatred made me rethink

how I viewed small acts of bullying within my own life. Now, instead of seeing a small act of bullying and ignoring it, I see that small act as a piece, a piece of a chain that was the continued abuse against a certain person or group. Recognition. It was like a switch flipped, I got it. The ability to recognize. Often we take the act of recognition for granted. We assume that when a “bad” thing happens, we’ll recognize it; however, more often than not we are busy, focused, and self-centered, not recognizing what is happening to others, only self. This translates, over time, to an insensitivity to events that affects others. “College students today are less likely to ‘get’ the emotions of others than their counterparts 20 and 30 years ago, a new review study suggests. Specifically, today’s students scored 40 percent lower on a measure of empathy than their elders did” (Beyner, *All About Me?*). My generation, largely, has grown up in an ultra-competitive, ultra-me-first, and ultra-uncaring world. Horrible. People anymore just do not care. Nevertheless, the instruction I received on the Holocaust changed that. It opened my eyes to why you have to care. If you do not care, then who will?

Furthermore, as we continued learning, I continued recognizing, identifying, and understanding the smaller pieces of intolerance. It starts with a homophobic slur made at a fellow classmate. Then, it builds; another homophobic slur, then another and another and another. The chain continues, growing and growing and growing, while I just stand there, neutral. Consequently, the next question we pondered in class was, who is more at fault the perpetrator or the bystander? We all agreed the perpetrator was to blame, but also concluded that the bystander was also at fault. How can you just watch violence against someone occur and do nothing? You cannot. When a person is being abused over and over again, you must seek action. However, people often claim excuses for not getting involved: “They think, ‘It’s none of my

business,' 'They fear getting hurt or becoming another victim,' 'They feel powerless to stop the bully,' 'They don't like the victim or believe the victim 'deserves' it,' 'They don't want to draw attention to themselves" (*Eyes on Bullying, Bystander*). This logic of, "It's not me or my problem; therefore, I don't care" is horrid. By not standing up for what is right you allow the problem to grow. In the end, as individuals we must ask ourselves will we be yet another link in the chain of abuse, or will we be the action that breaks the chain?

Additionally, in psychology there is a phenomena called The Bystander effect where, "When there is an emergency, the more bystanders there are, the less likely it is that any of them will actually help...A famous case occurred in the early 1960, where Kitty Genovese was attacked and eventually murdered over a 45 minute period during which 38 people witnessed the attack and did not lift a finger to help in any way" (Latane and Darley, *Bystander Effect*). Wake up! This is what happens when you choose a path of neutrality, ignominy.

The final lesson I took from the Holocaust was, "when in doubt, help." When abuse happens, verbally or physically, and there is a hint of wrong doing, intervene. It is easy to sit back and watch, but life, like bullying, is not won by those who are idle. In the Holocaust those who observed the horror, and did nothing will forever live with shame; shame not for what they did do, but for what they did not do.

When bullying occurs and you merely watch and observe, you are participating. You let it happen - first link. You allow someone to be preyed upon again - next link. You tell not only yourself, but everyone else around you it's tolerable - another link. You say he/she isn't important enough to care - it continues growing, multiplying in its obscenity. Stop! You cannot

let it happen - recognition. You have to stand up for the victim - engage. You have to send a message that this kind of action is not just and break the abuse. Break - break the chain of exploitation. Be the new link of resistance, which you construct by being involved and caring. In conclusion, you have to develop a mindset of chain breaking. Breaking up little acts of bullying to stop them from developing into bigger issues. If you do not, you will feel shame for not engaging.

“Sometimes when you fall, you bruise your knee or cut open your lip on someone’s foot that got in the way of your fall. You try to smile, even though it really hurts, because maybe they can still be your friend if you show that it doesn’t really hurt. Maybe you can show that you’re one of them, because you’re laughing and having fun, even though you *are* bleeding on the floor of the hallway.” (Odoneout, *Imagine This*).

This is how it starts, small. Bullying.

The Holocaust, the systematic murder of six million Jews and many others, could have been less tragic. People, the French government, ordinary people, leaders, politicians, and the entire world, were there when it happened; however, they chose the easy way: collaborating - watching and destroying. Those who we remember now and forever from the Holocaust are not those who collaborated, but those who stood up; those who decided to resist against the violence occurring towards Jews. Therefore, history favors the bold. In order to be remembered you cannot merely go with the trend, you have to rise up and fight. You have to break the chain.

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