

By Mikaela Peizer

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Holocaust Writing, Art, and Film Contest 2019**

Letter of Introduction

For this creative writing piece, I chose to honor Mrs. Ann Birulin who I am so grateful to have known personally. Mrs. Birulin was a beautiful and strong woman who always told me to be brave no matter the circumstances. The last time I sat down with her, I remember her telling me about her last encounter with her mother in Poland. I vividly remember the pain and agony in her voice, as she told me that I must never forget the horrific events that the Jews faced during the Holocaust. I always looked up to her and her story, as she was an inspiring and influential woman to me. Mrs. Birulin, along with her husband, Mr. Sol Birulin, were a living reminder of hope and faith to my family. The piece that I am submitting is a fictional two-part journal entry written from her perspective. The story is based on true events constructed from Mrs. Birulin's experiences during World War II. Although I will never fully understand the barbaric events that she and many others had to undergo, I hope my writing can spark some sort of emotional connection to audiences and help make a positive change to this world.

Sincerely,

Mikaela Peizer

February 27, 1945

There are just some things I will never understand. It has been a month since my liberation from the camps. A month since I escaped death, a month since I escaped hell, a month since I started to live again. I wake up with nightmares of returning to the Ghetto or to the barracks, where I will have to face constant beatings for no reason at all. Although I fear what is next, I know that I already survived my living nightmare. Within the last 30 days I have been able to receive complete meals, sleep in a warm bed, and most importantly, feel like a valued individual. Despite being weak and frail, the nurses treat me with respect and care for me. During my stay at the Displaced Person's Camp, Mrs. Stein comes to visit every week to try to reconnect families. She is no use to me, I have no family to be reconnected with. I never properly said goodbye to my family. I had to give up my rations of bread in order to get the news of my aunt's death. I still do not understand how I have made it so far. What did I do to deserve the continuation of my life? How could I fulfill the expectations of society when I do not even feel deserving of this life? A rabbi from America came to speak to the patients today. A stream of anger, hostility, and jealousy overwhelmed me. How could he speak with such kindness and tranquility in his voice? As if oblivious to our past, he strolls the hallway and motivates the patients to return to our religious practices. I have stopped listening to Him, how will I ever return to the religion that stripped the life out of my family? How can I erase the images of my cousin being shot, or SS officers puncturing my brothers lungs? I do not believe someone is protecting me, if so, why would He do all of this? If there were a higher power, how could He let his people suffer? If there is someone protecting us, I would have not suffered all these years.

How could I believe in a God who tore my family apart and starved me? I do not trust Him anymore, I do not trust anyone anymore. I cry myself to sleep while saying the *Shema*, hoping that it will help me in some way. "...*Adonai Echad.*" The Hebrew prayer saying God is one. One person can only do so much, and yet God himself is not able to protect all of us alone at once. That is when I remember, He is not the only one protecting me. My mother, my father, ancestors and all other relatives, are working together to help me survive. My family sacrificed their lives for me to be where I am today. I do not know what to believe, nor what to think, or what to do, but in some way I have to keep going.

February 27, 2015

Looking back, there are still some things that I will never understand. You can continue to ask and question, but there comes a time that you have to live the life that God gave you. Although there are memories I will never forget, and people I may never forgive, I have savored every moment of freedom I could obtain in my life. Although I doubted the universe, deep down inside I could never forget the beliefs I was raised with. The traditions, the prayers, the memories, all aspects of my life that are simply unforgettable. As the lively soul of my father drifted from his body, he still managed to plea, “Never forget who you are, where you came from, and who is your family.” I am Ann Birulin, a sister, a daughter, a mother, a human, and a Jew. May I never forget the Hebrew prayers that eternally express my gratitude for survival. As the Talmud teaches, a Jew can leave *mitzrayim*, but *mitzrayim* can never leave you. I will never forget what I endured nor what I lost. As I heard gunshots blasting the drums of my ears, I still shed a tear at the sound of my mother’s cries in Yiddish, “You and Chaim must go on and save your life! If you will live, through you I will live!” Those were the last words from my mother. Seventy years after the horrors of the Holocaust, I am still living. Not only is my mother living through me, but the souls of an estimated 6 million Jews live through the *mitzvot* I continue to accomplish. I empower my family and community to remember our past, to cherish our freedom, and to enjoy and savor the beauty of life for those who were robbed of it. May every holiday that is celebrated, every prayer that is sung, and every child born be the eternal revenge and proof that the Jewish Nation lives on, *Am Yisroel Chai!*

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