



The Meaning of Journey For The Living

A Walking Reflection on the Story of Mark Schonwetter and his Family

As a young boy, Mark Schonwetter and his family lived on a small farm in the town of Brzostek, Poland. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Nazi soldiers came to their town and made many changes. They ordered the children of Jewish families to be taken out of schools, Jews were forced to wear armbands with the Star of David, and arbitrarily took Jewish men away to work under threat of violence. One day, his family was given 24 hours to relocate into town because the Gestapo (the Nazi police force) was taking their house and farm.

Soon after the move, one night, Mark's father, Israel, didn't return home. The wife of the Polish Police Chief told Mark's mother that the Gestapo had taken Israel, and warned them that they should leave town immediately. Mark along with his mother and younger sister went to their friends, the Pilats, who sheltered them for the night and helped them barely escape discovery by the Gestapo. The Pilats ultimately realized the danger they were in and recommended that they should flee to a ghetto 15 miles away, where the Nazis wouldn't be looking for them.

Mark, his mother Sala, and little sister Zosia escaped the Nazis and began the long, arduous 15-mile walk by foot - reaching the Dembica ghetto in one night. **This is the Journey For The Living that you are taking during the month of May - to figuratively "walk in the shoes of Mark and his family."**

Thank you for #TakingTheJourney.



Mark's father, Israel Schonwetter, 1930



Zosia, Sala, and Mark Schonwetter

Throughout your Journey For The Living, we encourage you to read the prompts below as you complete each mile, or use them as classroom activities for participating students. We invite you to share your reflections on the prompt questions with us by:

1. Tagging us on social media @MSHEFoundation OR

2. Sending us an email to info@mshefoundation.org

We look forward to hearing how #TakingTheJourney impacts you this month.

Mile 1: Reflection

As you begin your Journey For The Living, we encourage you to commemorate the Holocaust and honor the memory of its victims and survivors. By reflecting on the atrocities of the past, we can ensure they are never forgotten, and never repeated. The Holocaust was the genocide of European Jews during World War II. Between 1939 and 1945, Nazi Germany and its collaborators systematically murdered approximately **six million Jews**, which equated to around two-thirds of Europe's Jewish population. They also murdered 5 million non-Jewish people, with a focus on eradicating many other racial, ethnic, and disability groups.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. How can we ensure that the memories of the Holocaust are preserved for future generations, and why is it important to remember this history?
2. In what ways can education about the Holocaust help prevent similar atrocities from happening in the future?

Mile 2: Remembrance

As you continue your Journey For The Living and metaphorically "walk in the shoes" of Holocaust survivor Mark Schonwetter, we invite you to think about his story (*on page 1*). Survivor stories are not just a matter of historical education, but an important way that we can bear witness to humanity's darkest chapters - highlighting the consequences of hate and discrimination.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What emotions did you experience while reading the story of the Schonwetter family?
2. How can storytelling and personal accounts from survivors help us better understand the impact of the Holocaust on individuals and communities?

Mile 3: Awareness

Prejudice and discrimination were the early warning signs that ultimately led to the worst atrocities of the Holocaust, and unfortunately, hatred still exists in our world. The FBI reported that hate crimes more than doubled between 2014 and 2022, the highest rate recorded since they began collecting statistics in 1991. As a participant in Journey For The Living, you can raise awareness about the dangers of hatred and create a world where all people are treated with kindness and respect.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. How can the knowledge of the Holocaust help us recognize and confront injustice?
2. What are the dangers of prejudice and stereotypes, and how can we challenge them in our daily lives?
3. How can small acts of kindness and solidarity make a difference for those facing hate or discrimination?

Mile 4: Empathy

By listening to personal stories of Holocaust survivors, such as Mark Schonwetter, future generations can begin to feel empathy for the atrocities experienced during that time. We invite you to listen to 2-3 additional survivor stories from the Holocaust and other genocides around the world at the [USC Shoah Foundation](#). Try to emotionally connect with each survivor's struggle and circumstance, and then encourage others to do the same.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. Why is empathy important, as we hear about the suffering of victims and survivors?
2. Is it important to retell important details accurately when sharing these stories? Why?
3. What type of action or compassionate response do you hope sharing Holocaust survivor stories will elicit in others?

Mile 5: Tolerance

To build a kinder world together, it is imperative to promote respect for people of different backgrounds, religions, and cultures. It is estimated that there are over 6,000 languages spoken globally and over 5,000 different cultures worldwide, contributing to the rich tapestry of humankind. Here are a few tips that you can implement in your daily life to learn about and celebrate people who may be different than you:

Mile 5: Tolerance *Continued*

- **Ask questions** about different cultures, religions, and backgrounds
- **Celebrate diversity** by participating in and honoring the milestones of other cultures and religions, such as their annual holidays, events, or festivals
- **Explore new perspectives** by reading books or watching movies that share stories of different cultures and religions

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What are some types of diversity you see in your community or school, and why are they important?
2. What are some things you would like to learn about others' beliefs and culture?
3. What diversity do you bring to your community or school? And what do you want others to know about it?

Mile 6: Compassion

Expressing kindness towards others and taking action to alleviate their pain is at the heart of compassion. When you volunteer or raise money, like with the Journey For The Living, you are acknowledging the historic violence and trauma of the Holocaust and actively working to make sure its lessons live for generations. With every step you take on this journey, or volunteer hour you commit to other causes, you are fighting the pain and disconnection in our society that leads to hate.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What's an example of a time someone showed you compassion, and why was it important to you?
2. What types of compassion did you learn that Holocaust survivors received?
3. What is a kind thing that you could do for someone else today?

Mile 7: Introspection and Learning

The Holocaust was fueled by a combination of personal discrimination, such as antisemitism, as well as societal prejudice. At the time, Nazi propoganda actively promoted and reinforced negative stereotypes about Jews.

Mile 7: Introspection and Learning *Continued*

It's important to assess your personal biases and prejudices. This is not a comfortable journey, just like the arduous path that Mark Schonwetter took to escape violence, but very important. Ask yourself questions, such as:

- Do I treat everyone fairly?
- Do I have any stereotypes about certain groups of people?
- What privileges do I have that others might not?

Training your mind in self-awareness and critical thinking erects a defense against harmful stereotypes and misinformation.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to review our beliefs and consider challenging ideas?
2. How do the media and society influence my perceptions of others?
3. What is a cultural stereotype that you learned is false? Why is a more accurate understanding important to promote a kind and caring world?

Mile 8: Action

It's not easy to inspire individuals to take action against hate and injustice, but even the smallest steps can make a difference, just like the ones you are taking in this journey.

A commendable example of this is Holocaust Hero Sophie Scholl, a key member of the White Rose, a student-led resistance group out of the University of Munich. The group courageously stood up for what they believed and advocated for resistance against the Nazis by distributing leaflets. Even the largest social movements in recent history, like civil rights, gender equality, and anti-war, started and reached their power with the support of millions of regular people taking important individual actions.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. Why is action as important, or more important than beliefs?
2. What things can you do at your school to advocate for others?
3. What action for the rights of others have you learned about, and inspired you?

Mile 9: Solidarity

Each person who adds their voice or body to a cause to amplify an issue is taking part in a form of solidarity. However, marginalized communities and underrepresented groups do not typically have the same power to make change in large, established systems.

During the Holocaust, the Danish people came together in solidarity to help Jewish neighbors and strangers alike escape danger. When the Nazis in Denmark ordered the deportation of Danish Jews to concentration camps, the Danish people organized smuggling operations. They hid Jews in homes and institutions, and organized secret sea crossings to Sweden. Together, they managed to rescue the vast majority of Denmark's Jewish population.

Joining a cause, or helping to organize support, can help movements gain a foothold and stand up to many forms of hate, discrimination, and oppression.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What's a specific type of discrimination you have seen someone else experience?
2. What could you do to express solidarity with that person or group?
3. How do you think your support would make that person feel? Why?

Mile 10: Healing

Survivors of any serious trauma, such as those who experienced the Holocaust or another genocide, work to heal for the rest of their lives.

In your own life, the need to heal or help others heal may be on a much smaller scale, such as experiencing a fight with a friend or a disagreement with a family member. After any major conflict, truth and reconciliation processes help both the aggressors and victims come to terms with their actions. If someone has hurt us and offers a sincere apology, it provides feelings of validation, relief, and a sense of closure. Even though we cannot alter the events of the past, acknowledging past harms remains crucial.

By setting aside blame and retribution, healing is possible through greater understanding and peaceful collaboration.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. Has someone ever hurt you? If they apologized, how did it make you feel?
2. Even if we can't change the past, why is acknowledging past harms important?
3. Is there someone you can apologize to for a hurt you caused?

Mile 11: Community and Inclusivity

As seen during the Holocaust, segregation and isolation only breeds fear and resentment. We must work with those who are different from us and invite them into our communities to build relationships. It is comfortable to stay in our set routines and groups, but we must challenge ourselves to grow, change, and be better than we are today. The mutual respect and understanding that come out of these efforts create a more inclusive and equitable society that is resistant to hate and distrust.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What communities are you a part of?
2. What makes that community important to you, and what would you like others to know about it?
3. What kind of outreach could you do to another community to show your support?

Mile 12: Empowerment

When you empower, you're giving your power to others to use. Your support, your time, your vote and your money can bolster the work of individuals and groups that speak out against hate and bigotry. Many voices were silenced during the Holocaust and other historic tragedies, but people like you kept the truth alive by lending their power to ensure positive change.

Your willingness to share your power through Journey For The Living not only honors the memory of those whose voices were silenced, but also paves the way for a future where all individuals are empowered to speak out against oppression and discrimination.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What things make you feel powerful?
2. What could you do to help people different from you feel powerful too?
3. What are some things your school can do to empower others in your community?

Mile 13: Resilience

Holocaust survivors, such as Mark Schonwetter, have shown incredible resilience - defiantly making it through the worst circumstances imaginable to share their first-hand accounts of discrimination and brutal violence.

Mile 13: Resilience *Continued*

We honor their resolute stand against hatred every time we acknowledge the dignity and truth of their lived experience. We ensure that their stories will stand as testaments to the dangers of hatred every time we recount their stories of determination and survival.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. Why should we share the stories of Holocaust survivors and other unheard groups?
2. How can our support help them recover from past harms and become stronger?
3. What survivor story that you have heard through this experience that you would like to share with others?

Mile 14: Legacy

Reflect on the enduring legacy of the Holocaust and its lessons for future generations. For more than 80 years, survivors and their allies have worked to ensure the terrible lessons of the genocide are not forgotten. We must now take on that responsibility. We must make sure that this legacy does not fade, that human rights are protected, and that genocide does not return to our world.

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What are 3 important lessons from the Holocaust that are relevant today, and how?
2. Based on these lessons, what current global conditions or issues should we speak out on, or take action against?
3. What would you do to prevent another Holocaust or similar atrocity?

Mile 15: Commitment

During your final mile of this journey, we encourage you to renew your commitment to never forget the lessons of the Holocaust. Only with the dedication of every witness can we hope to stop future hate and promote kindness, respect, and inclusion in our society. We hope you will join us in pledging to continue the fight against hate and discrimination in all its forms. Your commitment will bring about a brighter and more compassionate future for all.

Mile 15: Commitment *Continued*

PROMPT QUESTIONS

1. What will you do to make sure the lessons of the Holocaust are never forgotten?
2. How do you hope your actions will make our world a better place?
3. What other types of hate and discrimination do you want to stand up against?

Thank you for #TakingTheJourney this year. Your support helps make our world a kinder and brighter place.

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