

SCHWAB HOLOCAUST ESSAY

By Alana Reid, 8th Grade

People have always made an effort to commemorate difficult historical events, but none perhaps as much as the events of the Holocaust. There have been books written, movies made, and memoirs published. There are moving ceremonies such as candle lighting ceremonies and name reading ceremonies during which the names of all the victims are recited out loud. There are tours of the places where these tragic events occurred and trips specifically designed to make certain the tragedy is remembered. Additionally, there is listening to the story firsthand from survivors, the telling of which can be very hard for them. Sadly, due to the passage of time, these survivors are a resource that we will not have for much longer.

Some people might ask why we have to remember tragic events like the Holocaust. They can't imagine that such a thing could happen again, but if we don't remember, if we let ourselves forget, they could be terribly wrong. The most important reason we must remember the Holocaust is so that we don't start ignoring seemingly insignificant actions that can accumulate into a much more serious situation. The Holocaust did not just happen overnight. There were many small steps that led up to it, anti-Semitic articles, persecutions, political speeches, and more.

We see some of these seemingly minor actions occurring to other minority groups even in our modern world, which is why it is not enough for just the Jews to remember the Holocaust. Many people have a hard time understanding just how horrendous the Holocaust really was. Six million Jews died during this horrendous event, but they weren't the only ones. Romani, homosexuals, and Jehovah's Witnesses were just some of the other groups that faced persecution, and the total of all the people murdered by the Nazis was

over ten million. Additionally, many people died from starvation and disease. During this horrible time period, people died from being shot, burned, gassed, and overworked.

Even after hearing many reasons that it is essential for us to remember events like this, people will still pay them little attention. So let me add a personal touch. My great-grandparents, through bravery and perseverance were able to escape before being caught up in the war. But many others in their families were not so lucky. If my grandparents hadn't managed to get out of Europe before the Holocaust, I wouldn't be here today. I need to follow their example and be willing to act.

We live in a day and age in which many of us feel as if we have overcome the types of beliefs that led to the Holocaust. But the truth is that there are still many incidents of intolerance for Jews and for other people. As the grandchild of people who saw so much of their families destroyed by the Holocaust, I have to take to heart the words of Elie Wiesel (human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize-winning author of more than 50 books, including *Night*), who said, "For the dead and the living, we must bear witness." What does that mean? Is it enough to know it happened? Is it enough to come together for a commemoration ceremony once a year? I think Elie Wiesel wanted more from us. He, like my grandparents, was a man of action, and I believe he wanted action from all of us.

As a young person, I have to ask, "What can I do?" Though I may not be able to solve all the world's problems, I can still make an impact on the people around me. For instance, as a school student, I can resolve to stand up to bullying in school. There have been many news stories of kids across the country who have been harassed due to their religion. They are forced to put up with constant verbal, and sometimes physical, abuse because of certain stereotypes concerning their religion. Sometimes it happens so often that other kids don't

even realize it is a problem, so one of the most important things I can do to help is to stop behavior like this when I see it. If I see someone being bullied for their religion or for any other reason such as their skin color or family background, I can stand up for the person by confronting the offender, and if that doesn't work I can contact an adult. What I must not do is just stand by and watch, because as the history of the Holocaust has taught us, inaction can be just as harmful as action.

Standing up for others is just one goal a person can take away from learning about the Holocaust. If every person stood up and said no to bullying, to mistreating others for who they are, there would be a far better chance for peace in the whole world.

