

# My Responsibility

OTA, Masayuki

Iwata Nogyo Senior High School

What responsibilities do you have?

To do your homework? To put out the rubbish? To go to school or work? I have these responsibilities too. However, I have another huge responsibility. I didn't ask for it but I accept it. You see, I may have been born in Japan to a Japanese father but I have an Australian mother whose family history I am bound to tell. I am only 17. Why is it my responsibility to tell it? I am obligated to share it because Holocaust survivors are fading away.

My very own grandparents were and are Holocaust survivors. That makes me a third generation Holocaust survivor. There are a growing number of people who are unaware that 6 million Jewish people were murdered by the Nazis who were the ruling party of Germany during WWII. This event is what is referred to as the Holocaust. By telling my grandparents' stories I would like to ensure that such an attempt to kill off an entire minority group never happens again.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be rounded up like animals, to have your house and all your possessions taken from you and to be pushed onto a train designed for cattle, while having so many people on the train that you cannot sit down? Men, women and even children! Imagine, not even having a toilet, let alone food or water for days!

My grandmother was my age when this happened to her. When the train doors finally opened, she and her family were all sorted into two groups: those who were to live and those who were to die. My grandmother's parents were sorted into the group destined for the gas chambers and crematorium of this place called Auschwitz. She never saw them again.

Auschwitz was probably the most infamous concentration camp, where this systematic murder took place. I know this story from my family's firsthand recounts. My grandfather told me most of them. I heard that my grandmother did not want to talk about it. Can you imagine being in a place so thick with smoke and ash only to find out later that it was human bodies being burned? I know I couldn't.

Could this have been averted? I don't know but, I have heard that a man named Edmund Burke once said, "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing".

My great uncle explained the meaning of this, "If you see somebody being picked on, say something. Don't be a bystander. Be an upstander. Do something because one person can make a difference".

As my grandfather says, "Group pressure is very strong, but it is possible to say no".

My grandmother was saved by such a person in Auschwitz, when she had gotten very sick and had been taken to the infirmary. Were it not for an upstanding nurse who put a sheet over her face pretending that she had died, my grandmother would have been sent straight to the gas chambers by the "Angel of Death"; the notorious Nazi doctor, Joseph Mengele. This courageous act saved my grandmother's life while at great risk to the nurse's own life. She would have met the same fate as my grandmother would have. This must have been a very difficult decision for her to make. I sometimes wonder what I would have done and whether I would have had the courage to do so.

Discrimination against the Jewish people started escalating in the 1930s as Anne Frank writes about. She was a young Jewish girl during this time who wrote a diary about these events which was later published by her father. Jewish people were denied jobs, entry to schools, curfews were brought in and eventually they were herded into ghettos where multiple different families were forced to live together. Every Jewish person had to wear a yellow star. My grandfather experienced this in Budapest when he and his father were forced to march out of the city along with many other Jewish people. They were flanked by Nazi guards with machine guns who were shooting anyone trying to escape. It was on this march that he ripped off the yellow star and escaped. While on the run, he was helped by upstanding people who refused to conform to the Nazi policies.

I hope that I have been able to make a small difference and fulfil my responsibility today, by sharing with you a fraction of my family's history. It is not easy to make the right decision. It sends shivers down my spine to see that history shows us most people are bystanders. I like to think that we all would have been people like the nurse and those who helped my grandfather. Thank you.