

Here we are again. Y'all just can't seem to get enough of story time. Three years ago, I stood in the cemetery for the first time in front of all of you and we talked about Harry Fuller, his sister Flora and American Legion Post #48 of Garnett, Kansas. Two years ago I stood at the banner ceremony and we talked about Gene Sheern, John Shinkle and the USS Mount Hood. I had planned on being on hand for the Memorial Day ceremony, but instead we recorded the story of Prairie Brown and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918. So we're back, live, I'm here, and it's story time again. I don't know about you but I think this is quickly becoming a habit. I think that we should serve tea and cookies and I should get to tell this from a rocking chair like a proper librarian at Story Time at the Library. Whatever your choice may be for refreshments for this edition of Story Time, make it a good one. To each his own.

It's time to put a story with a handsome face 12 feet above us on a banner that is smiling back through time it seems. It's time again to look at a face a little differently, knowing a little more about what we see behind those eyes, and perhaps a little more grace for the faces that dot the audience around us. They say that war changes people. That the weather worn lines in faces are deep enough to hide the horrors that each face has seen. The face we are talking about today was drafted into service at 38 years old. Far older than most of the other soldiers in his company. The eyes in his picture from 1945 are bright, but it's the worn lines on his face that tell a different story. Its the deep lines around his mouth that seem to either be caused by smiling or frowning. The lines at the corners of his eyes either from joy or furrowing his brow, but the thing that draws me to this particular veteran is his eyes.

75 years ago, those eyes were in England, France, Germany and Belgium. Those eyes were delayed from the D-Day attack in June of 1944 and held back in England until August. They were stuck on a 'limey meat boat' overnight in the English Channel before setting foot on Utah beach at Normandy. Battery A of the 773rd Field Artillery was on the move to St. Maars France after landing, 90 miles from the active German lines. They rested near Verdun where the Luftwaffe flew nighttime missions with flares to locate the sleeping Allied troops in preparation for bombing missions. Those eyes saw over the desolation during the Battle of the Bulge where they were stuck in a foxhole for weeks. A gentle man from Westphalia, Kansas was on the brink of a history that the world would never forget. He is nearly 40 years old with a group of 18-20 year old men scared for their lives as they hear the planes zooming overhead and praying that it's friendly aircraft and not the enemy. After the Battle of the Bulge his unit is attached to Patton's Third Army as he chases the Germans back into the "Fatherland." The gently weather-worn Kansan is a truck driver and known for his

mechanical prowess. The pictures his daughter has show him standing proudly next to his truck in France. With Patton, the 773rd moves deeper into Germany. Patton's Army is effective at flushing out the German soldiers along the way, it's nearly the end of the war. The pair of eyes we are talking about has seen many many miles by now. It is almost V-E Day. It is 11 April 1945. This is the day that the 3rd Infantry walked into Buchenwald, Germany. There they find over 21,000 prisoners behind a locked gate that reads: Jadem das Seine.

“To Each His Own.”

The phrase on the gate is a Nazi perversion of the metaphor. They mean it to signify that each race should be kept to his own. They mean it to say that intermingling of the religion of Judaism among others will not be tolerated. They mean it to serve as a reminder that the Jews were unfit to be a contributing part of the society they lived in. Patton's Third Army finds a kind of atrocity that not only can't be forgotten, but has physically scarred the landscape where it stands to this day. They have found Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

Some of you will know that name. Buchenwald. That single word evokes a whole range of emotion. A lot like Auschwitz-Birkenau, Dachau, Bergen-Belsen, Mittlebau. Some of you are thinking, it's a concentration camp, it doesn't take a doctorate in history to know what happened there. Others are thinking, “Ugh, this is depressing. She really needs new material.” This is new material and behind a set of the most deeply calm local eyes featured on a banner here is a moving story about what he saw when he got to Buchenwald. Buchenwald was one of the first and the largest of the concentrations camps within the German borders in 1937 and remained active through the entirety of the war. Prisoners came from all over Europe and the Soviet Union, the mentally ill and physically disabled, political prisoners, Romani gypsies, freemasons and prisoners of war. All prisoners worked primarily as forced labor in local armament factories. The insufficient food and poor conditions, as well as deliberate executions, led to the 56,645 documented deaths at Buchenwald of the quarter million prisoners that passed through the camp and it's many sub camps.

I will tell you the following briefly, only because I don't want to give any light to the horror that was Buchenwald and the atrocities committed by the commandant of Buchenwald Karl-Otto Koch and his wife. He's not the name we want to remember, it's his wife, Ilse that is the remembered name. This isn't the name that people remember though. They remember her as the “Witch of Buchenwald,” “The Butcher of

Buchenwald,” and a whole host of other expletives. During their tenure as leadership of the camp, the Kochs ruled with an iron fist. Karl-Otto was eventually imprisoned in Buchenwald for disgracing both himself and the SS. The charges included private enrichment, embezzlement, and the murder of prisoners to prevent them from giving testimony. He was executed by firing squad one week before American troops arrived in 1945. Think on that for a moment, Koch was so bad that the SS stripped him of his title and imprisoned him in the very camp he was to oversee.

His wife would gain her notoriety after the close of the war when the Allies investigated the allegations of the prisoners. She pilfered money from the prisoners to fund her own exploits. She ruthlessly killed prisoners whom she didn't like. She had procured prisoners for her own “uses” based on the tattoos that adorned their skin. Think lamp shades made of \*ahem\* tanned hides. Imagine a woman so deranged that she chose prisoners based on their tattoos for “preservation.” The Witch of Buchenwald left her mark on more than just the prisoners, when the 773rd was assigned to the clean-up of Buchenwald, they were struck by the sheer volume of shoes, purses, lampshades and other “leather” goods that were held in the Commandant's home. It is that brutality that is deeply written in the lines of our soldier's face and they are so deep that it affects the psyche of anyone who has since learned of Buchenwald. The sensory memories of the smell of filth, sickness and the ashes in the air from the crematoria never left him.

The very first images of the Concentration Camps published by the Allies for the world to see in 1945 come from Eisenhower's visit to Buchenwald. The grainy video shows hundreds of malnourished skeletal people begging for help, medicine and food. They are a drastic change to the robust young men in uniform in the same frames who stared back at them aghast at what they discovered. The soldiers move through large piles of skeletal remains, help hold up the prisoners who are sick with dysentery, typhoid and a malaise of ailments. All in the frames show signs of shock, disappointment, unease, heartache, concern, and fear of the future. Our local hero probably stood in that camp heartbroken at how anyone could be so very evil. I could list many more things that both of the Koch's were accused of, but we're in polite company. And quite frankly, I really don't want to go there.

That nearly 40 year old set of eyes laid his sight upon the horrific landscape at Buchenwald and it disturbed him to talk about it in the years that followed. He saw first hand the piles of remains, the crematoria, he saw prisoners in their striped uniforms with barely the strength to stand. He saw the lampshades, purses, shoes and

other “leather” goods inside the camp. His daughter says that when he finally would talk about what he saw, she remembers him speaking with such venom and scorn for the repulsive woman behind it all. Those eyes drove German prisoners to Detention Camps by the truckload. They snatched a German soldiers hat from his head. The handmade woolen cap is still in near pristine condition, sewn by the incredible craftsmanship of Jewish seamstresses.

Paul H. Drum’s story didn’t end in Germany though. He came home to Westphalia and married a young Woman from South Dakota who worked for the Department of the Navy in Washington D.C., raised a whole passel of kids, started a plumbing business and put Germany behind him. Many of you from around Westphalia knew him. The softness in his eyes in later years never telling that he had seen evil first hand. He was a quiet man when it came to his service, he didn’t belong to the VFW. He didn’t talk about his service much to anyone, because like many others of his time he didn’t think people should have to endure what he saw. He saw things that changed him. He saw things no one should ever have to see. He saw exactly how evil people can be to each other.

It’s easy for us to sit back among our friends and neighbors and recognize our differences as, “to each his own.” It’s a simple thought, whatever works for them. It’s easy to think that for Paul it was easier to not talk about what he saw, and for others it is just as easy to talk about it. It’s easy to sit here 75 years later and say, “he didn’t want to talk so to each his own.” I would imagine though if you asked him what he thought of “to each his own,” he would likely have a much different opinion than any of us.

Paul Drum saw things that his mind had to have struggled with reconciling the ideas of good and evil. He experienced a part of history that is so laced with horror and heroism at the same time that he compartmentalized it, because it’s too much. He put it in the big Army Trunk he came home with, seldom got it out and when the memories of the emaciated prisoners, lampshades, and the smell got to be too much, he would shove it all back in the green trunk and put the memories away. Paul didn’t think anyone should have to see or know what he saw, because it is was too much for him, it’d certainly be too much for anyone else.

Therein lies the rub though, stories like Paul’s should be told. We should revere people who have stared evil in the face and come home to bring more light into the world. We should be retelling those stories of the recovery from evil, and we should be

paying attention to the stories they are not telling. We have to endure stories of evil to be able to place value on the stories of good. Paul's story isn't necessarily one of sadness at its core. He was a man who answered the draft, despite his age, performed his duty, and came home to spend the rest of his life in peace.

The veterans around us all have a story. Sometimes it's about getting into trouble during basic training and doing push ups in the mud at a drill sergeant's feet, but some of the most quiet veterans have the far deeper stories. Those are the stories that you can see in their eyes. They've seen a thing or two more than what we expect, and deserve a little more grace. The lines in their faces hiding the real story behind their eyes. The story that they don't like to tell, the story of horror and evil. It's no doubt that the victims of World War II were changed, the landscape changed, the geography of boundaries changed, politics changed and society changed, we take pause to remember those victims who were never seen again, but we can't overlook those who came home.

Where the Germans took the phrase "to each his own" to mean that each nationality and religion should be secluded from each other, we take it today to mean something far more flippant. It is far too easy to take a phrase that once had so much horror attached to it and desensitize it. The Holocaust is not something to take lightly. The gravity behind what Paul Drum witnessed at Buchenwald was so horrific that a new word had to be created to describe it. Prior to 1944, there was no word to describe it. After 1944, we called it genocide. The next time you think about or say that phrase, "to each his own," reflect on what it means to you, take a spare second and think of Paul Drum, Buchenwald and the Holocaust. Think of what he saw, the acrid smell in the air, the ashes that sat in small drifts like snow, what he experienced, the tanned hides, skeletal prisoners and the truckloads of German soldiers,, and then look someone in the eye and try to say it. Or don't.

Jadem das Seine. To each his own.