

A Child's Story of The Holocaust

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Horror, sadness, death. These aren't even close to what the Jewish endured. The unspeakable things they saw and went through. Over 6 million dead, and only a handful survived. Innocent citizens, families, and children were shown no mercy. This was truly mankind at its worst.

It started out as normal days but slowly got worse. Jewish citizens had barely any rights. Soon houses were emptied. Nazis burst into homes taking Jews and inspecting homes for any hidiers. They were taken to ghettos where they were destined for death.

Henri and his family were among the many Jewish people. Henri was born in 1926, in Brussels where his family left the East to get away from antisemitism and persecution. They moved West to Belgium.

In the first week of September 1942, Henri and his family were taken from their home in the Rue Coenraets. Germans shouted “Alle Juden Raus!” (all Jews out!) as Henri and his family were forced out into the crowd of people. There were screams, and shouting and people were beaten. Women jumped out of top story windows holding their babies, desperately trying to avoid capture. Even though he was just a little boy, Henri knew something was wrong by the screams and looks on everyone's faces. There was nowhere to hide, nowhere to run, Henri was trapped.

In a few days, they were on wagons with thousands of people heading back East. After many dreadful hours, they arrived. Henri walked out of the wagon and immediately pinched his nose. The smell was awful! He looked around and held his father’s hand so they wouldn't be separated. Germans pushed through the crowd, screaming. People were beaten and shot. Germans shoved people in groups. Henri and his father were in the same group, but the women of his family were separated. Sadly, the women were immediately gassed and cremated. Henri

and his father were told that they would work as slave laborers and when no longer useful, they would be gassed.

As Nazis took them away and undressed them, shaved them, disinfected them, and after they were disinfected they were shown to their living spaces. They had small living spaces, barely any food, and diseases filled the air. Henri found out that the awful smell was the crematorium. In the camp, death was no longer a once in a while thing. Everyday thousands of people's last words were spoken, but not heard. Never to be spoken again, including Henri's father.

Every morning Henri got up bright and early with the other men, A Nazi routinely beat them and then Henri was off to work. He walked in a straight line and didn't dare talk. He watched his every step so he didn't trip or fall, because if he did, he would be shot and killed on the spot. Every day, he passed people making happy, joyful music, which Henri did not understand. 'How could you play or even think about being happy in this place?' he thought. The music rang in his ears and he passed the music like it wasn't there. One morning, a man tripped a few rows in front of him. He was immediately killed and taken away. Jews were treated like worthless ants, and the Nazis were the shoes that stepped on the thousands of helpless ants. Not caring one bit about who they were, how old they were, or anything else about them. When they looked at the Jews they saw worthless objects that needed to be thrown away.

A Nazi asked Henri what his number was. He paused. "What is your number boy or I'll shoot you!"

"177789, Heil Hitler" Henri said quickly.

He walked past the guard into a work space where he and other men were to build their own death. They built gas chambers. After hours of miserable work they walked back to their

barracks. A line of Polish Jews walked by, looking happy! A Nazi yelled “Come on! You will take showers and then go back to your families!” But Henri knew that they were going to the gas chambers and would suffocate to death. Henri was glad he wasn’t in that line but he felt sick when they walked by knowing he would be one of the last people to see them alive.

Then he saw it, a little boy about 7 with light blue eyes. The kind that stare into your soul. Their eyes met and he saw the boy mouth “Help!” He looked terrified. Henri wanted to help but what could he do? They would both get shot if he did. A tear ran down the boy's cheek and he kept walking towards death. Henri was furious, he was tired of watching others die over and over again. He wanted to help, but how? He would just get shot like the others. He couldn’t get the little boy out of his head. Thinking about those blue eyes soon to be turned to dust. Henri decided to go outside for some fresh air. Even though the air wasn't fresh and stunk, Henri got used to it. He walked around a little when he saw another boy about 9 this time. He had green eyes and was sweeping. But while sweeping he was whistling. It was the most beautiful tune he had ever heard, and calmed Henri. Out of the corner of Henri's eye he saw a Nazi running toward the boy. “Hey!” Henri yelled at the kid and pointed to the Nazi. The boy ran as fast as he could, but the Nazi was faster. The Nazi picked up the kid and broke him in half like a stick. The Nazi smiled, Henri screamed and ran inside. He was astonished by the horror, he couldn't move. He laid in bed petrified until he finally cried himself to sleep, where the nightmares were waiting.

It was like this for years. Years! Until the Soviets arrived. The Nazis tried to hide. They even begged the Soviets for mercy. That was a sight for sore eyes! The Soviets arrested Nazis and took them away. They also took the Jews on trains and gave them plenty of food. Henri was so glad to have his own room again! He was also glad that in a couple weeks he wouldn't look like a starved skeleton anymore and he could take a bath! Henri missed those things!

Henri looked out at the horizon, mesmerized by all the colors blended to perfection! It wasn't until then that a smile perked on his face and he knew right then that he was really free!

That is just one child's horrible story. Millions endured the same thing. Some even younger, and some older. But most of those stories were cut short. Shorter than they should have been, and not the way they should have ended. Only 6 to 11% of Europe's population of children survived. The rest, dead.

"You did not live through Auschwitz. The place itself is death." Henri said nearly 75 years later. Picture yourself as one of them. We must remember these horrible moments in time to learn from them and make sure they never happen again.