

Annabelle Lee, Year 13, Macleans College

Forever and always, my dearest

1943

My dearest Elizabeth

Though the world has swallowed us whole, I pray with a yearning embedded in my bones that this finds you. But even hope feels like an impossible wish in a world that shunned us away. The earth itself feels as if it's forgotten how to cradle its children, as if even the sky above has turned its face away in shame. The very act of inking this down on yellowed paper feels both futile and necessary. But I know that these words are the last fragile tether that binds us together, it will obliterate the bounds between myself and my other, you.

I've asked the heavens and the earth to give me something, any semblance of certitude that these words will reach you. But I am bestowed with nothing. I write to you not because I am guaranteed, but because to write is to resist the silence.

Here, I walk among the living dead. Every face is a hollow mask, stripped of life, too exhausted to weep, too broken to feel. We shuffle through this nightmare, shadows of the people we once were. However, the memory of your rosy face, your tinkling laughter, your unyielding spirit is the single thread that keeps me clinging to life.

They want us to vanish into a white void, to dissolve into the dust, nameless and forgotten. But I will not let them erase you from me. No matter what they do, they will never sever the bond that anchors our love whole. I carry you, Elizabeth, inside me. Every breath I take, every heartbeat, is yours.

If I do not emerge from this darkness, hold onto this truth: I love you with a ferocity unmatched by anything else in existence. It is the one thing they cannot dim. It is ablaze within me, red and fierce and unyielding.

My darling, no matter what, you must live. You must survive, even if the world tries to swallow you whole, even if it ravages every cell in your body and decimates everything you've ever known. You must live.

I am sending this letter into the dark, praying that somehow it finds you. Even if I don't.

I will love you until my last breath and beyond.

Ima

2024

My dearest Ima

I am here, and the blue skies stretch above me, vast and unbroken. Each day, as the sun rises and spills its golden warmth over the earth, I feel your presence woven into the very fabric of the morning.

There is not a day when you don't cross my mind. Even when the children run free and the adults laugh over coffee, in those moments I ache for you. I wish you could witness their joy, immerse

yourself in life without the stifling bounds of grief. The world around me bursts with life, yet it feels hollow without you here to share it. I long to tell you about the children's dreams, their endless curiosity about the world. I want to share the triumphs and tribulations of our days, the little victories that fill my heart with pride, knowing you would have revelled in their achievements just as fiercely as I do.

The world has changed since those dark days, and yet the scars of the past remain etched in our hearts, a poignant reminder of what was lost. The echoes of that dark time resonate through generations, urging us to remember and to honour. Since the end of World War II, the ways in which we commemorate the Holocaust have shifted, evolving from solemn observance to spirited celebration of life. The silence that once surrounded our grief has been filled with the voices of survivors, those brave souls who refused to let their stories die in the shadows.

The people bear the stories of those who have been lost, honouring their memory with the vibrant tapestry of our lives. Commemoration evolved into an active dialogue, a jubilant celebration of life that transcends the shadows of the past. We gather in parks, schools, and community centres, not merely to mourn but to share in joy, resilience, and fortitude. There are festivals where the tales of survival are woven into the very fabric of our gatherings, where we exalt our shared humanity and the unbreakable bonds that connect us all. Art exhibits flourish, showcasing the creativity born from suffering, inviting future generations to grasp the weight of history through the microcosmic lens of beauty and expression.

In the next eighty years, I envision a world where the memory of the Holocaust evolves into an interwoven tapestry, entwined with threads of hope, resilience, and the profound bonds of human connection. Memorials will transcend the role of mere stones inscribed with names; they will transform into dynamic spaces alive with art, music, and narratives that echo through time. I imagine children lighting candles in remembrance, their faces illuminated by the gentle flicker of flames—a radiant testament to a hope that refuses to be dimmed.

Imma, I have come to understand that we must carry the stories of those who were lost with the brilliance of our lives. Our people should no longer be horizontally assimilated into a single narrative but instead integrated through collective respect and understanding. It is imperative that the injustices of the past do not slip into obscurity but instead become a guiding beacon, steering our actions toward a future rich in compassion and understanding. My love for you and shared humanity is a flame that will never be extinguished. In nurturing this flame, I hold fast to the promise that your memory will forever be cherished, your struggles esteemed, and your spirit celebrated with unwavering devotion. Each act of kindness, every moment of joy, becomes a tribute to your resilience, to their resilience—a testament that your life, and the lives of so many others, will always resonate in the hearts of those who remain.

I love you Imma, forever and always
Elizabeth
