

Year 9 – 10 Honourable Mentions

Neha Babu, Year 10, Botany Downs Secondary College

Not like Bruno

Bruno was oblivious, young and naive
He saw it all firsthand
the starvation, the abuse, the neglect
maybe he even heard the screams

Some people back then, used to live with
earplugs
Some just pretended they were deaf
Because as the screams got louder
It was easier to close their eyes and bow
their heads

Later they apologized
Then they put up statues, and plaques
They wrote names upon the walls
To make up for the kindness that they
lacked

But even now, when we take the earplugs
out of our ears
We cannot feel what they felt
Even when we open our eyes
We cannot see what they saw, or the cards
that they had been dealt

I sit here under the corner of my covers

my finger on the page
Blue and white stripes on my pajamas
My head full of rage

Bruno saw the bruises
But he didn't understand their pain
Bruno heard about the torment
He couldn't understand the hatred and
disdain

And neither can I, not truly.

But I can. Feel the crisp lines in this book
And I can. See the words in this text
I cannot feel their pain, but I can feel the
regret
I cannot see their blood, but I can see the
posters and the plagues

I am like the boy in the striped pajamas
But I am not like Bruno
I am not oblivious or naive
I am not deaf or blind

I cannot see clearly, but I can see

I can remember

Irene Arora, Year 10, Botany Downs Secondary College

80 years ago, I felt the uncontaminated soil
touch my sinful existence
80 years ago, the air
felt lighter
with the stench
of my family,
My friends,
My beloved
F a d i n g from the oxygen
That suffocated me
every morning when I woke up
and every night when the days blended
to start another sunrise and witness
another sunset

of my meaningless existence

80 years ago they cut off my wings
and locked me in a cage
Until they opened the door and told me to
fly
But there I was
Blood still pouring out
Walking away to find the remnants of my life
Left in the sky

60 years ago, I had treaded
To the place where they
told me to rebuild

my life, left in shadows
following me around
Waking me up from my sleep
They confided me to remember with those
who had suffered
Too
Left with 6 million less hearts
To mourn with those who have bled
Too
To try to recover myself
With those who are empty inside
Too

60 years ago
While they focused on buildings that were
Broken
governments that were
Torn apart
They turned,
A blind,
hidden,
sheltered eye
To our gassed ones

40 years ago, they took off their blindfolds
And saw the mess that they left for us to
pick up
40 years ago
They wrote stories about the pain we felt
They produced shows about the revenants
of a life we lived
And one by one untied the world's
blindfolds
To open up everyone's eyes
And hearts

40 years ago
And brought us the bricks
And the concrete
And picked up their shovels
To rebuild our homes, our shops, our towns
Our memorials
With us

20 years ago
They gave us a voice
They asked us for our stories
They saw our brutalities
And with the fall of the Soviet Union
Came the rise of the mourning's

20 years ago
They gave me people
Who knew about my past
Gathered in one place
Filled with understanding
And regret
And gave me a shoulder
to cry on
To help me let my aches out
Without
Judging

20 years ago
They gave us 24 hours a year
To make sure that no one ever forgot about
us
To give us more bandages
And stitches
To slowly heal the bruises
Purpling all over our bodies
As they watched them
Slowly fade

Today
As those who suffered, fade
Away into small atoms
Mixing
And blending
And integrating themselves
With the atoms of those around the world
Their stories fade
Around me
Turning into tales of history
Books in the library
Who are untouched
Among the decimal numbers surrounding
them
Turning into the videos
Never searched for
Never viewed
Never noticed
Left as titles and online pfs
Taking up storage space

The fragments of my mind
They asked me to spill on paper
Put on projectors for kids to
Mindlessly watch
As soft snores
And clicks of keyboards
And facts

Turn into more important
Then feeling
When they are more worried about their test
results
For their holocaust essay
For their world events quiz
Then being able to help

Today,
I feel
the looks I get
when I tell them I survived
When I answer the curious gazes
And sign autographs
Like a celebrity
A lucky existence
Left to rot in the depths
Of his own mind

Today, I feel the support
On papers
Tucked away into homed
Documented into records
In boxes
Left in buildings
To say they care
To say they are helping
In hushed whispers
In empty rooms
In 10
Years from now
From the moment I pass
They won't remember how it felt to be caged
They won't have anyone to remind
Them
The worth of being free
They won't have anyone to shake them
From their darkening bags

And their glaring screens
To play while the sun still falls
And the moon still rises
And the stars still shine
And be able to go home to their beds
10 years from now,
They will see us as statistics
Among others
That they have to clog their head with
That they are told
To know
And they will visit our graves

And remember us for 24 hours
To show that they care
Before they go on with their mundane
existences for the remaining
364 days
Until we tell them to remember again
Until the
8736 hours
Where we remind them
To stop this from
Happening again

In 20 years
They will start doing a little less

In 30 years
They will start donating a little less

In 40 years
They will study us a little less

In 50 years
Our graves will gather a little bit more moss

In 60 years
The tours
Of the sites we were confined to
Will remain empty

In 70 years
The 24 hours
They allocate to us
Will fall over our heads
As we pray

For a holiday that they see as beneficial
To their birthdays
Black Fridays
Forgetting our unpleasant existences
Marking us off as a checklist in history
Burning us and leaving us
Alone
Because if they don't see it for
Long enough
They might just believe it never happened

80 years from now
They might just care
They might tell their kids about us
They might leave their screens
And go outside
And value the free

Unscarred moments
They have
They might value
Their unscathed bodies
And clean wrists

They might care about us
Watch videos about our testimonies
Our voices
And let our highlight our passages in history
Or in 80 years
They might forget about us
They might forget
Until the obligatory 24 hours
We tell them to remember
We tell them to imagine what our life was
like 160 years ago
And go back to their fluorescent lights
Under their screens
And leave our videos unwatched
Old searches

In history
As they watch movies
With the salted caramel popcorn
We never got to enjoy with our loved ones
They might not see the sacrifices we had to
make
To make sure no human
Would have to experience pain
And suffering
Like this again

But all we could hope for
Is someone
Someone who cares
Someone who remembers
Watches our testimonies
Visits our graves
Reads our rotting spined books
And makes all that we scarified
Worth the barbed wire