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For the dead and the living we must bear witness
—Elie Wiesel;
Motto of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Why do we remember the Holocaust? The answer seems obvious: How could we ever forget the murder of 11 million Jews, homosexuals, Roma, Jehovah's Witnesses, physically and mentally handicapped, and everyone else who didn't fit the Nazi's narrow definition of human? How could we possibly forget?

But the truth is, we already have. We've already forgotten the grim lessons of the Holocaust. The phrase "Never again," a rallying call for genocide prevention, has been said so many times that it has virtually lost its meaning. We said it after the Holocaust, shocked and sickened at what we found at the concentration camps. We said it after the terrible slaughters at Bosnia and Cambodia. We said it after Rwanda—which, in terms of deaths per day, was more deadly than even the Holocaust. And after the ongoing genocide in Darfur ends, in some way or the other, we will say it again—and we will mean it wholeheartedly, like we always have, and yet stand by helplessly when the next genocide occurs (Power).

This is a cycle we must break; for the sake of our humanity and for the sake of our children.

The greatest enemy of genocide prevention is ignorance, in all its many forms. The blissful ignorance of the contented Westerner, unaware of suffering halfway across the globe—the blind ignorance of the genocidaire, who was perhaps just an innocent civilian once, but now he raises his machete to people he thinks of as inhuman, simply because he was told they were—

the brutal ignorance of the leaders, who, fueled by irrational racism and hatred, are capable of seeing an entire race of humanity as a tumor in need of removal—the willful ignorance of the bystander, who sees the slaughter from a safe distance but quickly turns his head away, unwilling to be involved—all these forms of ignorance are a blight on humanity and a danger to oppressed peoples around the world.

This is our enemy. This is what we have to fight: this nescience, this apathy, this ignorance -fueled brutality. The only cure is knowledge. Why do we remember the Holocaust? Because we must. It is our obligation as human beings to honor the memories of the dead. But more than that: we must also protect the future of the living.

Knowledge; about the Holocaust is slipping away from us with every generation born after World War II, with every survivor fading quietly into the grave, with every high-schooler falling asleep in history class. And every time we forget the lessons of the Holocaust, the ever closer we come to repeating it. My generation must do its part. We who have no personal memory of the Holocaust must do our best to remember it, and make the people around us remember it as well. There are so many ways to keep the flame alive. Volunteer, as I do, at the nearest Holocaust Museum, or simply just tour it. Ask the teacher for an extra-long unit on the Holocaust, or do a project on your own or with friends. Honor Holocaust Remembrance Week, wear a button or a sticker. Learn, understand, educate, inform, ask, answer—and simply talk. It will be enough.

I know that because I have seen firsthand the effect Holocaust education can have. I volunteer at the Holocaust Museum. Nestled among austere government buildings and memorials to the long-dead, it is a small but intense testament to the idea of education, of cultural understanding; a defiant flame burning against the shadows of ignorance. This is where I

work during the summers, driven by the indelible idea that every mind touched means a life saved. And here is what I've learned: people are ignorant. They don't know what the concentration camps were. They've never heard of the Nuremberg Trials, they've gone their entire lives without learning who the Nazis were. They have no idea who died and how many. But here is the more enduring thing I've learned: people can be taught. The horrors of the Holocaust can be instilled in them. Men and women who've never given a thought to others outside their community or country can be made to weep at the thought of the suffering of people they've never met. These are men and women who will stand up to injustice where they find it, who will speak out against ignorance when they hear it. These are men and women who will fight against genocide in whatever small but significant ways they can, because they have learned the lessons of the Holocaust.

Education can have an effect. Knowing our painful past is our best guarantee towards having a peaceful future. "Ultimately," writes James Waller in his book *Becoming Evil*, "being aware of our own capacity for extraordinary evil ...is the best safeguard we can have against future genocide" (271). Only when we have seen the terrible depths of human cruelty can we rise to the majestic heights of human compassion. Knowing about genocide is integral to stopping it. Remembering past atrocities is the best thing we can do to prevent future ones. When genocide begins, whether we are millions of miles away from the killing or at the epicenter of it, everything depends on what we have learned from the Holocaust and how we translate those memories into action. "...We cannot hermetically seal off Nazi war crimes in the past," writes David Matas. "What we remember of them determines our future. Remembering the Holocaust and changing our behavior in light of its lessons deals with the past—and also makes a statement of what we are, what we want to become" (123). Forgetting the Holocaust would be like killing

those 11 million all over again; for when we fail to remember their deaths, we also fail to remember the terrible lesson learned from them. For the sake of the living, we must remember the dead.

This is why we remember the Holocaust: to prevent another. Let us honor the memory of the 11 million dead by fulfilling the promise we made in 1945, the promise whispered over mass anonymous graves, the promise shouted to every emaciated survivor and every grieving relative: the promise of *never again*. Let us put right our failure to those 11 million by making sure none join them in an early grave. Let us fight against genocide and ignorance around the world for the sake of those 11 million dead, and for the sake of the billions still living, and especially for the sake of the mothers and fathers still threatened by genocide. Let us always remember what humanity is capable of. Let us carry that reminder in our hearts and bring it forth whenever and wherever we see ignorance and injustice.

Let us always remember. Let us never forget.

Never again.

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