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One Must Walk Away

In Ursula Le Guin's famous short story, the city of Omelas is perfect - festive, joyous, happy - Utopia. However, there is a catch to their comfort and contentment: an impoverished child lives in the grossest conditions one could imagine. Everybody in Omelas knows the child suffers. Guin states, "This is usually explained to children when they are between eight and twelve, whenever they seem capable of understanding.... They all know it [the child] is there.... They all understand that their happiness ... depends wholly on this child's abominable misery" (Le Guin).

In this poignant story, one realizes a significant truth commonly referred to by the Jewish term "scapegoat." More oft than not, one group of oppressed people pay the price for the luxury of oppressors. Propaganda via political socialization continues the vicious cycle until the oppressed, or foreign assistance, arises and brings about change. In 1938 Germany, anti-Semitic works such as Josef Goebbels' *The Poisoned Mushroom* warn children to beware of "insidious danger of the Jews by using the metaphor of a mushroom which seems attractive on the surface but is in reality poisonous" (Rees 8). Furthermore, Darwin's ideas spread throughout the Western World - biologically and philosophically. The Nazis believed, "it is not by the principles of humanity that man lives or is able to preserve himself above the animal world, but solely by means of the most brutal struggle" (Rees 7). Therefore, in order for the Germans to rebuild from the loss in World War I - which the Jews allegedly caused—and become the supreme superpower of the world, someone had to suffer as the scapegoat: the Jews (Rees 8).

The numbers stagger any sane man - 1.3 million killed in Auschwitz; in one span of only eight weeks, 320,000 Hungarian Jews were executed. Other factories of death - Sobibor, Belzec,

and Treblinka - exterminated an estimated 250,000, 600,000, and 800,000 - 900,000 people respectively (Rees 149 - 151). Many people know little about the camps because long before the war's end "the Nazis had destroyed the camps and the land was left to return to forest or ploughed back into farmland," but approximately 1.7 million humans lost their lives. The Nazis "wanted those names erased from history and sought to ensure that every physical trace of them ... was removed" (Rees 147). But one must never forget. One must never forget the ghettos, the cattle cars, the crematoriums, the hunger, the beatings from Kapos, the children ripped from their mothers, all the other excruciating afflictions and deaths Jews and other minorities experienced under the nefarious Nazi regime.

Elie Wiesel expressively encapsulates the personal effects of the Holocaust in his literary memoir Night: "Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence which deprived me for all eternity, of the desire to live" (Wiesel 34). After arriving at Auschwitz-Birkenau, the SS Men command, "Men to the left! Women to the right" (Wiesel 29)! Eliezer never sees his mother and sister again. He lives through cold nights, exhausted, nearly starving, or freezing to death, seeing and experiencing beatings, trying to avoid the next "selection" for death, trawling to various concentration camps, and braving the harsh inhumane elements with his deteriorating father who ultimately dies. The once innocent, deeply religious Jewish boy loses all faith in God and humanity once the American army liberates him from Buchenwald on April 11, 1945. Wiesel writes, "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed.... Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever Never" (Wiesel 34). Never shall he forget it; neither should the future generations.

History has a tragic tendency to repeat itself. As time continues, the easier it becomes to forget. "There have been horrific atrocities before, from Richard the Lionheart's massacre of the Muslims of Acre during the Crusades, to Genghis Khan's genocide in Persia. Maybe future generations will see Auschwitz in the same way... but that should not happen" (Rees 299). Furthermore, all around the world, bedeviling dictators such as President Omar al-Bashir continue to marginalize and murder innocent masses. In March of 2009, "The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for al-Bashir on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity for his contributions to the tragedy in Darfur" (Wallechinsky). However, he still resides as President of Sudan. Over time, with intelligence, and technology, no one knows whom the next genocide will affect. Unfortunately, without more Holocaust lessons, assuredly more victims will die at the hands of calloused hearts.

To prevent prejudice, discrimination, and violence from persisting, young people must pro-actively give of their time, talent, and treasure. For example, Zach Hunter, an average seventeen-year old, lives in the suburbs of Atlanta. At the age of twelve, Zach learned about the modern worldwide problem of slavery and decided to take action. Starting his own organization, Loose Change to Loosen Chains, he encourages members of his church and school to give their loose change to fight slavery. All of the money goes to collaborating institutions such as the International Justice Mission and Free the Slaves. His first campaign raised nearly ten thousand dollars. Five years later, Zach still campaigns as an abolitionist internationally. Having published two books, Zach says, "If everyone found one thing that they were passionate about, the world would be a better place. For me ..., it's freeing slaves. If that's not your passion, there's got to be something else" (Jones).

In that same vein, other young people must start clubs and speak out on the reality

of the degradation of human life. For that to happen, one must sacrifice time, money, even comfort. Clubs must shed light on the darkness. Books, movies, music, and other art forms must continue to expose the past and affect the present. Furthermore, the younger generation should vow to improve the political socialization in America. Future fathers, mothers, and educational and media leaders should vow to exist as the antithesis of Josef Goebbels and creatively let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as mighty streams in homes, schools, and through the airways. The blood of approximately 6 million people full of passion, purpose and hope cries out from beneath the ground. Sobibor, Treblinka, and Belzec cannot simply return to farmland when 1.7 million members of the human race died there (Rees 298).

If one chooses not to speak out and remains insouciant to the Holocaust and other similar present day happenings, one must place himself in the same position as the people in Omelas - continuing to live comfortably in his culture while people around the world undergo utter misery. Fortunately, Le Guin ends her short story with a beautiful twist, hence the title, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," A few decide to walk away from the Utopian city. They cannot live there knowing their joy depends on the torture of the innocent child. Each one, alone, walks away from the beauty and comfort. "They seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas" (Le Guin). I know where they are going also – out of the darkness, into the light, to expose the depravity with action.

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