

Dear Mr. Levi,

When I had to choose a non-fiction book to read for a school assignment, I read *Survival In Auschwitz* to learn more about World War II. It was impossible just to read without reflecting on the abominations you experienced. I have heard stories from my great grandparents who were also in Auschwitz and experienced first hand the atrocities the Nazis committed. After reading your book, my admiration and respect grew for my Great-Grandfather John Hanus and all the others who had survived or perished during the Holocaust. This book is a testimony to the perseverance of human beings. Reading *Survival in Auschwitz* is prevalent now because of the rise of antisemitism around the world. Your story, like that of my Great-Grandfather's, inspired me to make sure the stories of survivors will never be forgotten and that there will never be another Holocaust.

Your horrific experiences in the concentration camps, especially the brutality that the Nazis treated you and other Jews with just because you were Jewish are seared in my memory. You describe in your book all the ways the Nazis' tortured you, including freezing temperatures, starvation, sleep deprivation, slave labor, and severe physical suffering. I know you could never shake the shadow of Auschwitz, especially after losing close friends in the concentration camp. My Great-Grandfather John lost much of his family in Auschwitz. Both of you are survivors. My Great-Grandfather carried his story silently his whole life and was hesitant to share it due to embarrassment and the need to protect his children from the horrors. He was embarrassed because as a Jew, he felt that he allowed the Holocaust to happen and was saddened that he did not speak up as the hatred was rising. While writing *Survival In Auschwitz*, it must have been difficult to relive those horrible days, but your book has inspired other survivors all over the world to share their stories. It also encouraged me to take action.

After reading your book, I had asked my Grandfather to tell me about his father's life during the Holocaust for a school assignment. I learned that after trying to escape France, he was sent to Auschwitz and only survived through his courage to escape. One day while working just beyond the Auschwitz barriers, he saw a coal train passing and courageously ran out and climbed into the train. He quickly buried himself in coal and waited inside the pellets until nighttime. After he felt it was safe for him to leave the train car, he walked to the closest town outside of Auschwitz and happened to find a woman who hid him. She saved his life. Even though he suffered and witnessed the murderers of so many, including his family members, he fought to survive and acted with bravery. After the war, my Great-Grandfather married and together he and his wife immigrated to the more accepting United States of America to build a life. The United States that my Great-Grandfather immigrated to is vastly different from the present day United States with the rise in antisemitism, as well as a growing intolerance for others who are different. This has made my participation in a program called Student to Student even more important because I am able to teach my peers about the false stereotypes surrounding Jews and that we are all human beings.

The goal of Student to Student is to reduce antisemitism and develop leadership skills while breaking down barriers that surround Judaism. Along with a diverse group of Jewish students, I go all over the Chicagoland area and teach about Jewish topics such as the Holocaust, Shabbat, and Kashrut to schools that have a small, if any, Jewish population. The purpose is to

correct false notions and prejudices that students may have about Jews by teaching them our customs and answering any questions students have about Judaism. Part of the problem in 1930s and 1940s Europe was that people believed the propaganda that the Nazis were spreading about Jews and other minorities because they never interacted with Jews before and they never stopped to question the truth behind the false rumors the government controlled media fed them. This program is impactful to the students by correcting students' overheard stereotypes about Jews and creating a safe space for discussion. My goal in participating in this program is to educate my peers so that another Holocaust will never happen. I hope, after leaving each school, that I am helping make a difference because I see that the program changes students' ideas and their views about Judaism and Jews. We try to instill a tolerance in students for others different than themselves.

Additionally, through my involvement in *Names Not Numbers*, I interviewed a survivor and recorded his story so that it can be shared for generations to come. This organization documents Holocaust survivors' stories and makes them into a film so their stories will always be told. The timing of these videos is especially important as survivors are aging. In fact, the man I interviewed sadly passed away earlier this year. Hearing about his devastating life in several concentration camps and his struggle to survive as a Czech Jew, I realized with even more clarity how terrible each person's experience was. I was responsible for recording his story and editing the video so it could be published and shared for mass viewing. In fact, there are over 70,000 views of the *Names, Not Numbers* videos. The film is shown at the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Yad Vashem and it is available through their online library. Each film is archived at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem, Yeshiva University's Special Collections Library, and Yad Vashem. The impact of this film is to keep the stories alive, as this is the last generation of survivors. This way, no one can deny that the tragedies of the Holocaust ever happened. These interviews are a testament to the hatred of humans against "others", especially Jews. I recognized from reading your book that your goal was to share your personal story so that it touched readers, such as myself, and will be preserved in the future. I had a similar goal through my participation in *Names Not Numbers* of preserving survivors' stories so that another Holocaust will not happen in the future.

Your book inspired me to accept all people for who they are, not their label, because everyone deserves to be treated equally and I saw that did not happen to you or my Great-Grandfather. I hope, one day, the world is a more tolerant place where everyone is accepted. Now, with the rise of antisemitism and an increase in hate crimes against Jews worldwide, it is even more important that the stories of survivors are shared and people learn to accept differences of religion and race. By speaking your truth, you did your part in preventing another genocide from happening ever again. I have the same goal, which is the reason for my involvement in Student to Student and *Names, Not Numbers*. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter and listening to my reflection. I hope through my actions to make a positive change to society just like you did in writing your book.

Sincerely,

Joshua Kupietzky