

**Middle School Essay**  
**First Place**

*A Pear of Lessons*

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Testimony of Ilse Diament

At lunch time one day I grabbed my lunch out of my backpack. What I discovered was that the pear inside my lunch had become mushy, and the remains of the pear were smeared all over my backpack. When I got home that day I told my mom that I didn't want pears in my lunch anymore. Recently, however, a fragment of a story from a woman who lived through the Holocaust brought a blanket of shame over me. After hearing her story, I came to realize how much one small fruit can mean to someone who had faced great evil and how much I take for granted.

The sound of gunshots could be heard. Naturally, most would be scared, but for Ilse Diament it was a different story. Those shots were not from the enemy, but from the British soldiers who had come to liberate the prisoners from the unbearable conditions of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Planned in January 1942, Hitler's Final Solution to put all the Jewish people in gas chambers no longer threatened Ilse.

A British doctor came to Ilse and gave her a shot because she was sick with typhus. Then he gave her a can of pears. While talking about the pears, Ilse almost couldn't describe how good they tasted. After eating scarcely anything for such a long time, I can only imagine how wonderful those pears tasted to her. Now, every time she eats a pear, she is reminded of the first pears she ate after her liberation.

Never again will I complain to my mom about putting pears in my lunch. I realize how much I take for granted and how food that is always in my lunch bag could be so greatly unappreciated by me but so greatly appreciated by someone else.

Before studying my survivor, I was scared to learn about the Holocaust and the humiliation and torment that so many people experienced. Now I know that our generation needs to be educated about it because we are the ones who have the power to prevent genocide from ever happening again. Why should someone be discriminated against because of their skin color, race, religion, or appearance? If I see or hear someone being picked on, I should intervene and not keep walking like I didn't see it.

From this day forward, I will never be able to eat a pear without thinking of Ilse and her story and how she found the will to live so that she could educate those who don't understand the dangers of intolerance and prejudice. This sentence from the foreword of the book *Night* by Elie Wiesel sums up why survivors like Ilse tell their story despite the pain they have to relive: "Better that one heart be broken one thousand times in the retelling, if it means that a thousand other hearts need not be broken at all."