

*Horse Meat*

Hoyeon Lee

Woodbridge High School, Irvine

Teacher: Karen Briner

Survivor Testimony: Barry Bruk

Dear Mr. Bruk,

I must confess I don't share many of your experiences. I have never eaten horse meat to survive. Nor have I lived in the Lodz ghetto with more than thirty relatives in a house of two rooms and a kitchen. Nor have I had a father on his deathbed ask me for anything, even a piece of paper, to chew on because there was nothing else to eat.

During my lifetime, however, I have felt shame. And tired, weary exhaustion. And heart wrenching sorrow that comes from realizing there is not much, in fact almost nothing, I can do for a loved one clinging to my hands, asking that death be kind. And this is how I relate to your experiences.

In order to know what you went through during the Holocaust, I visualize looking through the eyes of a young sewing machine mechanic walking a few blocks from his cramped house in the Lodz ghetto in Poland to investigate a rumor. I easily spot the local hospital, the bleak building surrounded by empty German trucks waiting to carry Jews to concentration camps, but everything is strangely silent. Suddenly, a few windows near the rooftop open, and behind them, cruel fingers shove screaming bodies out the window... bodies of little children!

"What are they doing? The children aren't going to make it on to the trucks!," I quickly turn my head, shut my eyes, but I can't shut out everything. I hear the children fall helplessly through mid-air, shouting, and landing on the hard concrete below. Crack. And then silence. I fall to my knees, trembling, and the only emotion caught in my gasping lungs is deep bitterness. The rumor is true.

Mr. Bruk, your testimony has given me answers to questions that have challenged me since I first learned about the Holocaust. I asked myself *why* it is important to remember the pain endured by Holocaust survivors. If we relive the pain, can we ever forgive the evil that caused it? If so, will we truly ever be able to *stop* the next genocide? I've begun to understand that it is important for people like me not only to listen and learn but to spread the word of the courage present within this tragedy. When people learn in detail the individual stories of the Holocaust, we *will* gain the courage to prevent genocide from happening again. We will act because of the empathy we feel for a young Jewish boy who ate horse meat to survive.

I must also confess, I stopped taking notes halfway through your testimony. By then, my furious notes had become scribbles, unintelligible lines of quotes and scars pressed onto paper. And I felt a little embarrassed at the raw tears mixed in with the nearly century old wounds of a Holocaust warrior. But because I cried, I feel courageous. Because I cried, I know I can never forget.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A Holocaust Torch Bearer