

First Prize Prose, Middle School Division

Targeted

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Teacher: Jessica Kane

Survivor Testimony: Milton Belfer

When we think of memory, we think of past instances which have some kind of importance associated with them. When we think of spaces, we generally associate the term with an area, thing, or device that has not yet been filled to its capacity.

What about spaces of memory? A space of memory is a memory, either original or handed down, that has made a home for itself in one's being. It has essentially trapped itself and refuses to move on. For Holocaust survivors, recalling these types of memories is emotionally and physically exhausting. Choosing to confront something many others would rather suppress, Holocaust survivors share their memories in the hope that they are preventing history from repeating itself.

Milton Belfer was born in Poland and had a typical life before the war. His family celebrated religious holidays and festivals and worshipped at their synagogue. During his testimony, Milton confessed that when his family had guests at their home, so many people came that sometimes they didn't even recognize them! This made me think of celebrations at my house and laid the foundation for our shared space of memory.

Every major holiday my mom cooks tamales, menudo, and other Mexican dishes. We always have friends and family coming in and out of the house. Like Milton, I don't even know who some of the guests laughing and sharing in the festivities are! The point is we are enjoying ourselves, celebrating with family and friends, and reaching out to others.

When Milton talked about dismissing the rumors of danger and admitted that he paid them little attention, I was instantly reminded of current rumors surrounding immigration and the possibility that citizenship might be denied to the children of "illegals" born in the United States. Milton's situation and the situation today are very different. Yet, I feel targeted by the idea that a society without the group to which I belong would be a stronger, better nation. This is a shared space of memory that I don't want, but cannot help to acknowledge after my Holocaust studies.

What Milton describes will always remain his memories alone; I can only picture in my mind the ocean of snow and imagine the feel of the invading cold ripping at his bare feet, freezing them to the bone. Yet, through study and imagination I have come to share with him a space of memory, one where dark realities are met with strength and determination.