

First Prize Prose, High School Division

Shared Spaces

Victoria Moyzis, 10th Grade

JSerra Catholic High School, San Juan Capistrano

Teacher: Eileen McKeagney

Survivor Testimony: Sally Roisman

My name is Sally Roisman. I was born Sally Zielinski in Sosnowiec, Poland in 1930 to a middle class Jewish family. I was one of eleven children, the daughter of a textile wholesaler. When the Germans entered our town in 1939, my family fled within Poland. The occupation was widespread, leaving little choice but to return home to Sosnowiec. Anti-Semitism was rampant. Food was scarce. My mother said that she used to feed her cat better food than she was able to feed us. Sadly, in 1942, my father was deported, probably to Auschwitz, and never heard from again. My brothers went to concentration camps and my two older sisters were sent to a forced labor camp in Breslau. At age thirteen, I joined them at Breslau. Word came later that our mother and younger siblings were detained without any further communication.

These were Sally's words and she continued with a discussion of her feelings. The unknown fate of Sally's parents clearly haunted her. Her last vivid memory of her father as he was being deported was how strange he looked without his familiar long beard that he had been forced to cut off or risk having pulled out, strand by strand. Also, etched in her mind was the night she was so rudely awakened by German soldiers, torn from her mother's bed, and taken by bus to the work camp. That glimpse was her last image of her mother's face. It was traumatic enough to lose the parents she loved, but to not know what had become of them was continual torment.

I am also a teenager but born sixty-five years after Sally. I too have lost my biological parents and do not know their fate. The cause of Sally's separation from her parents was the Nazis' brutal discrimination against the Jews. In my case, Communist China installed the One Child Policy, which for cultural reasons, was biased against females and forced a separation from my family. If my parents wanted to have a son who would care for them in their old age, they had to abandon me or worse. Otherwise, they would be severely punished by the government with excessive fines and blocked without access to education for their children. At one month old, I was abandoned on a train alone and sent to an orphanage. The only information I had was a note attached to me with my birth date, the time I was born, and a plea to give me a good life. It also torments me not to know what became of my original family. I don't even have a last glimpse to remember. Like Sally, there are so many questions I would like to ask and so many answers that I will never know. Even though the details of our situations are very different, the loss and uncertainty about our parents caused by discrimination unites us. In my own way, I have begun to understand the horror of the Holocaust.