

### Oskar Schindler and the Key

As I boarded the school bus to Chapman University, I didn't know what to expect. And as I walked through the hall to the Holocaust meeting room, many questions filled my mind. I was there to hear Leon Leyson, the youngest survivor of Schindler's List speak to a group of several hundred people. As I listened to him, his words about Oskar Schindler intrigued me. When the lecture ended, many students dashed for the food table. But my interest got the best of me. I waited in a fairly short line of photo takers and curious parents for my time with Leon Leyson. As I shook hands with him and talked with him, he inspired me even more to write my Holocaust essay on Oskar Schindler. But not only my essay, Leon Leyson inspired me, a little twelve-year-old girl, to become more *like* Oskar Schindler. And that would be an extraordinary task, considering what an amazing man Oskar Schindler was.

Oskar Schindler was born into a Catholic family in the Sudetenland. As an adult, he became a German industrialist and joined the Nazi Party to help make his fortune. He moved to Krakow after the German invasion of Poland in 1939 and took responsibility for an enamel kitchenware factory just outside of a Krakow ghetto. He hired many Jewish workers from the ghetto. As Oskar Schindler's enamel factory moved from place to place, he was prepared with a list of all of his workers that would be joining him in each more. By means of this list, and bribery of German officials, he protected his workers.

A person have to be like Superman to be a hero. A hero is someone who doesn't think of himself or herself, but thinks of others. A hero shows conscience, knowing what is right from what is wrong. Oskar Schindler knew that the Jews were being mistreated and he knew that the Nazi torture and extermination of the Jews was wrong.

A hero also has courage. Courage is listening to your conscience and doing the right thing, even when it is very hard. Oskar Schindler risked his own life to help protect, and save, the Jews from the Nazis. He knew that the killing of millions of innocent Jews by the Nazis was wrong. He could have just looked the other way, but no, he didn't just sit there thinking about it, he did something. His bravery helped him save over a thousand Jews. Every life is important, and one person can make a difference.

The tremendous amount of courage that Oskar Schindler had is absolutely amazing to me. In fact, it is so amazing that if every person would take the time to learn about him, they would that each person's choice of courage would make a difference. Think about it: one person saved over 1,200 human beings! It might be impossible to eliminate prejudice and hatred in the world, but people of conscience and courage *can* prevent another Holocaust.

I can understand the idea of conscience and courage that Oskar Schindler had to have. Of course, I can't understand fully how difficult it was for him or the hardships he went through, but I can get the idea of how every person should show conscience and have courage.

Jews weren't the only people that were persecuted during the Holocaust, people with disabilities were too. And this is my personal connection to Oskar Schindler. I have

needed to show conscience and have courage in tough times. You see, I have a sister who has disabilities and is a special needs student.

I have conscience when I see people mistreating those with disabilities and I know that it is wrong. I try to have courage when confronting those who mistreat others. I try to stand up to them even though I know that they will thereafter look at me differently. In the end, I am much happier to have courage, even with everyone staring at me than being scared and just watching the people with disabilities being made fun of.

Oskar Schindler is my role model and a hero that I admire and feel I know. You don't have to meet someone in person to know them; you can meet someone through their story, like I met Oskar Schindler through the story that Leon Leyson told. As you get to know them and admire them, you can become more like them. I think that everyone should try to become more like Oskar Schindler. He not only did big things like saving many people, but he did small things too, things that made a big difference in people's lives. As I was listening to Leon Leyson's speech, he said that he remembered that Oskar Schindler would give him extra food because he was so young and small. And Oskar Schindler would take the time to know each of the worker's names. Leon Leyson can still remember these grand acts of kindness. Oskar Schindler didn't treat the Jews like outsiders, but like people.

During the Holocaust, it was as if the Germans locked up the Jews in a cage. Many people had the key, but didn't have the courage to use it. Oskar Schindler knew that he needed to use his key and he did, even though his life was on the line.

We all have the choice to do the right thing or the wrong thing, to be brave or to look the other way. Therefore, I want each of us to think about the following words and

place them in our hearts: *I will be a person of conscience and courage. I will know what is right and what is wrong. I will have the bravery to stand up for what is right. And by combining these qualities, I know that I can and will make a difference in the world.*

982 words

Sources:

*Microsoft Encarta Reference Library 2004*, article on Oskar Schindler.

Web site of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.

<http://www.ushmm.org>

Fifth Annual Holocaust Art and Writing Contest Entry Sheet, 2004.