

It Starts with Me

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What do the Holocaust and the Sudan have in common? Why are Elie Wiesel and Gerda Weissmann Klein important? Why should I wear green? Who are the Janjaweed? What can I do? These are questions that need answering and it's up to me to take action and respond.

Gassed in false showers and then burned in crematoria; shot in a selection; hanged on the gallows; murdered in death marches; withered away by malnutrition, these are some of the ways people were killed during the Holocaust. No one of any age, race, religion or physical appearance deserves to breathe his or her last breath because of such immense hatred. Elie Wiesel was just of the survivors who endured cruel punishment. Now he is a great role model to many people who feel that they can't go on. He's a reminder of what could happen again at any time.

“‘Be strong!’ And I heard it again like an echo, ‘Be strong.’ These were my mother's last words to me,” wrote Gerda Weissmann Klein in *All But My Life*. As babies were stripped from their mothers and tears raced down their faces, they couldn't possibly imagine the agony that stretched out before them. To stop such appalling behavior we must study and understand it. There is no one better to educate us than a survivor who experienced it herself. Gerda explained to us what happened and what we can do to help, but she cannot act for us. To continue her and Elie's legacies, we must also prevail over obstacles and help stop the present day genocide in the Sudan.

Terror, murder and prejudice against race are just a few ingredients used in both the Sudan and the Holocaust. Though it seems impossible, tragedy is occurring all over again. Innocent human beings are being persecuted because of their ethnicity . Rape, murder, and destruction hold sway.

Who is causing all of this destruction? The Janjaweed. The Janjaweed are armed men on horseback linked or allied to the government of Sudan and the Sudanese armed forces themselves. They are targeting the darker skinned, non-Arab Africans. [I think this can probably stand, though both are Muslims.]

What role do paper clips woven with green ribbon represent? Norway was where the paper clip was invented. During the Holocaust years, citizens in Norway demonstrated their opposition to the Nazis by wearing paper clips. I have made countless green paperclip wristbands to help show my opposition towards what is happening in the Sudan. I also string green ribbon through the wristband and write in gold ink “Save Darfur, Save Sudan.” When I do this, I raise questions, and by raising questions, I can raise awareness. When students ask me for a wristband, I give them the website for the Committee on Conscience at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Then they must research the situation in Sudan and tell me what they’ve learned. Once they do that, I give them the wristband. This may not be the biggest change, but every little bit of awareness that I can share with others is a chance to save a Sudanese victim.

Although we need to educate people, we also need to raise money. My friends and I have been fundraising, and now we have over \$1,000. We aren’t going to stop there. We have written a proposal telling people about ourselves and what we are doing.

We ask them to support us by donating money. We are sending the donations to the Save Darfur Coalition so it will go directly to Sudanese victims.

To liberate is defined as to set free, from oppression, confinement, or foreign control. Why do I wear green ribbons? I want to help make a difference in the world. I can't go to the Sudan and tell the Janjaweed to stop. What I can do is make people aware that this is occurring and that it needs to end. By making and wearing green paperclip wristbands and raising money, I'm working towards a solution. By watching films like One Survivor Remembers, Schindler's List, and Hotel Rwanda, and reading Night and All But My Life, I'm learning so I can educate others about genocide. Through education, we can stop this tragedy. Things aren't going to change by themselves; they will only change with each person's contribution, starting with me.