

First Prize Prose, High School Division

Selene Bruk
Gloria Gallardo
Ninth Grade
Orange High School, Orange
Survivor Testimony: Selene Bruk

The Holocaust shattered Selene Bruk's identity, but as it was being shattered, a new identity was shaped.

Selene Bruk was only in fifth grade when her identity took its first blow. She was forced to witness the unyielding hatred of the Nazis and their cruel treatment towards all the people she loved. The Star of David marked her as a Jew. It represented something more than just her religion. It gave the world permission to humiliate her and her family. Experiencing so much suffering and loss caused tears in her identity. She felt her heart beat at an incredible pace when she realized that she might never see her family again. The cattle cars separated her from all but her mother, but inside of herself, she found the courage to keep them forever in her heart. She survived five concentration camps: Stutthof, Birkenau, Auschwitz, Ravensbrück, and Neustadt. Each day that she passed at those camps her mother gave her the strength to keep living.

Her testimony was powerfully compelling because through all of the pain and suffering, Selene Bruk never completely lost who she was. After she was liberated, she found her father and brother when she needed them the most. They were the answer to her prayers; they were everything to her. After the Holocaust, she married a fellow survivor and had two daughters and five grandchildren. Years later she revisited Poland where she found herself standing in front of her old home, and everything came back to

her; all of the painful memories hit her like a wrecking ball. Everything that she did not want to remember was now forever engraved in her mind, but mostly in her heart.

From Selene Bruk I learned that when you have lost everything that there is to lose, you must always remember that your faith can be all that you have left to live for. Her hope and determination inspires me to believe that your identity can never be shattered when you know who you are. When Selene Bruk revisited Bialystok, her hometown, she was overwhelmed by the stillness, the silence that filled the air with memories that would never fade from her mind. Six million of her people have been silenced forever, but Selene Bruk vows never to remain silent and most of all never to forget.