

First Prize Writing: High School Division

*To Whom This Story Remains Untold*

Justin Johnson, Grade 9

Orange County School of the Arts, Santa Ana

Teacher: Abbe Levine

Survivor Testimony: Jack Lewin

Your words come to life, resounding through the speakers in the theater of my mind. My thoughts and your words meshing together at a point between my face and the pixel-composed computer screen. Drifting, diverse memories, none of which are the same as those of any other, speak to me, intersecting with my passions and my perspective. I put my fingers to the keyboard, in an attempt to capture a moment in the life of a victim of hate, of genocide, of the Shoah. The ideas filter through as if I were writing a screenplay, as if each word belongs in the scene description, or in the dialogue of a character. But the format constricts response, only conveying what is seen and heard, never internal thoughts, because we watch as third persons.

The testimony of a survivor is their memories, unscripted, unrevised, yet they transform us. At first glance, one might think the man sitting in the chair, speaking to an interviewer off screen, is just like any other man with his circular framed glasses, his graying hair, but through his words, the viewer is transformed as the picture FADES IN: to a scene from his story.

EXTERIOR: SNOWY ROAD IN POLAND. It is -- DAY. The air is filled with hate, six years after it all began with the German invasion of Poland in 1939. A throng of tattered skeletons march on through knee-deep snow, the temperature far below zero. Among them walks a weary JACK LEWIN, who longs to taste the pure white snow, but knows if he gives in that blood will come in tow. The officers ask for volunteers who can no longer walk. Lewin, eager, shoots up his hand with the rest; he can hardly talk. His friends shout to him as each hand raised above each head leads down a shriveled arm to a body barely human. Sunken eyes and tight skin ridden with scars. They are broken, hanging on the edge of the hell they are living. He follows with the rest to a destination that he already knows, has already guessed.

CUT TO: the movie inside my head, where I see this man. Jack Lewin has a story. He experienced the unimaginable and survived with memories to share. And, as I sit and watch him, as I picture each moment, the horror of this reality emerges. This isn't fiction; this is history. The thoughts awaken inside me of the hate-filled people who brought innocents to the slaughter, and I shed a tear when I see this man's story only has a few thousand views. That out of the seven billion living today, only a few have taken the time to hear what this man has to say.

CUT TO: THE EXTERIOR GATES OF AUSCHWITZ. It is -- AFTERNOON. Jack Lewin knew he was coming here, but he has no fear. For he knows when he arrives at the gas

chambers, that he can sit and rest, can stretch his legs and know he will soon be reunited with his family.

CUT TO: My mental theater again. Of course, this isn't how it happened. For if Jack hadn't lived, I would not have heard his story, would not have been impacted, would not be writing these words.

CUT TO: THE EXTERIOR OF AUSCHWITZ AGAIN. It is -- AFTERNOON. Jack marches through the gates. He waits beside the surgical hospital, a beautiful brick building. He asks someone, "Aren't we to be gassed?" The man replies, "Why do you ask? The crematoria, the gas chambers, were dismantled weeks ago. There are only buildings, barbed wire fences, and snow. You will stay here with us," he says, "don't fear." Jack smiles as he hears the question, "Do you see any Germans behind you?"

CUT TO: THE INTERIOR OF A ROOM IN CALIFORNIA. It is -- DAY. Sunlight shines through green drapes, fifty years after Jack was liberated. A tripod holds a camera that captures the face of a man whose story, when told, changes the hearts of the young and the old, and could change the minds of the billions to whom this story remains untold.