

Listen and Remember
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Testimony: Ilse Diament

As I look at the world, I see pain and suffering. I see mothers in Sudan burying their murdered babies. I see fathers in Syria crying for their children who were killed. Innocent people are being killed because of their race and religion. Yet, at the end of one of the most terrible displays known to mankind, the Holocaust, we said, "Never again." But when I look around at the world, I wonder – Are we learning from the past to change the outcome of our future? Are we listening to their stories? I believe the story of one brave young girl, Ilse Diament, is a story that we all need to hear.

It was in February, 1940 that an eleven-year-old girl, Ilse, sat doing her homework when she was startled by loud knocking on the door. She opened the door only to find five SS Nazi officers demanding her family pack as much as they could in thirty minutes. She obeyed the officer's orders and took only the most precious items with her. One was her bird, a sentimental and special gift from her parents. An officer asked her why she was taking the bird with her. Upon her response, the officer looked at her, took her bird out of its cage and twisted its head off in front of her eyes. As Ilse's tears streamed down her face, the officer coldly said, "Like the bird died, you will die too."

The officer's statement meant much more than just the death of her beloved bird. It was a symbol of what was to come for millions of Jews across Europe. Ilse recalls, "We went from one place to the other like a herd of cattle. Chasing us, they treated us like animals." She lived in the Lublin ghetto and somehow survived, only to be sent to the most infamous camp in Auschwitz. While there, she was forced to watch as a group of prisoners were shot in the head. She remembers how she saw their brains splatter on the ground and was then forced to carry the bodies to a grave. Ilse also witnessed tiny babies being ripped from their mother's arms and smashed to the ground. "There was screaming and praying. We cried out God help us, but nobody helped us." Despite the circumstances she faced for those years, Ilse was brave and strong and said it was a miracle that she made it out alive.

As painful as Ilse's story is to hear, it needs to be heard. From the mouth of a dying man in Auschwitz, Ilse heard the words, "Tell the people what happened here, whenever you will be free." My hope is that the tragedies we continue to see across the world today will remind us of the promise we made long ago to never again let this happen. My hope is that this time we will listen.