

“Hope is stronger than Hate”

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Deborah Levin walked slowly up the narrow staircase, her mind heavy with thoughts. Her thirteen year old son, Max, seemed depressed lately. His behavior could only be described as apathetic. Now Deborah knew why. Deborah was updating her shop's Facebook page, and she was curious about what Max was putting on his Facebook. Initially, everything looked normal. He posted goofy pictures, funny videos, and preparations for his bar mitzvah. Then Deborah looked at the comments. There were three or four children who were posting nasty comments about Max. Horrible names, rumors, it was all right there. She checked Max's friends' pages. More cruel comments. Now Deborah knew the root of Max's depression. He was being cyber-bullied.

Deborah reached the top of the stairs and opened the door to the attic. Dust floated through the shaft of sunlight coming through the window. A big black something caught Deborah's eye. The something was a trunk. Grandma Eva's trunk. Grandma Eva died a year ago. Deborah inherited the trunk, but she hadn't had time to go through it. Deborah slowly lifted the domed lid of the trunk. Inside were a couple books, a wool blanket smelling strongly of moth balls, and a diary. Being a curious sort of person, Deborah pulled out the diary. The first entry was dated May 11, 1933.

A week or so ago, Grandmother said to me "Eva, I want you to start a diary. This will be a time to remember." Grandmother is a wise woman. As she supplied the diary, I shall write in it. I do not think it is a very good time to live in Germany, but it is our home. Last night, the smell of burning paper filled the air. Some of the university students were burning books that are considered "un-German". Intelligent books written by Einstein and fascinating books by H.G. Wells. I will not discard my books because the Nazis say I should. They will go underneath a loose floorboard in my closet.

So-called Aryans have been boycotting my uncle's shop. A girl whom I once called a friend now shuns me because I am a Jew. On top of it all, now people are only supposed to read what the government wants them to. Books lead to thinking. I guess Hitler doesn't want much of that. Without my books, I would be like everyone else. Thinking only what I am told to think."

Deborah paused for a moment, her finger resting on the last letter in the entry. Deborah knew her grandmother had a difficult past, that she was tough. Deborah was just now beginning to connect her grandmother's past with the woman she remembered, the woman with white hair who baked and knitted. Deborah let out a small sigh and continued reading. Eva's situation slowly grew worse. By the end of 1933, Jews couldn't own land. The entries between 1934 and 1935 were sporadic. Eva's mother

was out of work. Her father made hardly any money. The next entry that really caught Deborah's attention was written in November of 1935.

I, Eva Kauffer, am no longer a German citizen. It is awful! The government is taking our rights away, piece by piece. The free will of the people follows, bit by bit, what with all the rules. Propaganda has a lot to do with what people think nowadays. Once Grandmother told me the only thing stronger than hate is hope. Sometimes I think hate is the strongest. Hate threatens to eat everyone up until nothing is left."

There was an ache in Deborah's heart as she read Eva's words. Eva's voice seemed to come right through the pages of the diary and into Deborah. Deborah thought of her son. Of all the mindless hate directed towards him. Deborah continued to read. There were fewer entries than ever over the next couple of years. They were all only a sentence or two. Eva was very busy. She helped her parents, went to school, and spent time with her ailing grandmother. The next entry of any length was written in mid-November, 1937.

Again with this propaganda! There is now an "exhibit" that is "teaching" Aryans about Jews. The whole concept is disgusting. The people who do these things are not children in the schoolyard who spread rumors. The consequences of their lies are much, much bigger. They want people to think Jews are more dangerous than anybody else. It's not true. There's good Jews and bad Jews, just as there are good people and bad people.

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I am so ashamed of Germany. The people are sheep. It does not matter what Hitler tells them to do, they will do it. No questions asked. He says "Hate the Jews!". All the sheep follow.

Deborah found herself thinking of her son again. Bullies were all the same. They convinced others of lies, and those who didn't believe were threatened. Nazis and teenagers on Facebook both.

Entries were short for most of 1948. Eva continued writing little notes. Books she read, conversations with her grandmother. Eva was smart enough to keep her anger in her diary. She knew if it leaked out from the written page, there would be trouble. Eva already had plenty of trouble. The final entry in the diary was written on November 10, 1938.

The last day or so have been very...eventful. Eventful seems like too small of a word, but I have nothing better. Last night I was at Grandmother's. She was not feeling well. Instead of going home, I stayed with her. Staying with Grandmother turned out to be in my best interest.

The sound of glass breaking, of loud yells, of screams filled our ears. The smell of smoke penetrated the walls and clogged our noses. Grandmother and I sat on her little sofa, one of my hands held in both of hers. We sat there for hours, praying that the destruction would not find us. Morning came. I must have dozed off, because when I woke bright sunlight streamed through the windows.

Whatever happened, it had not come to Grandmother's apartment.

"Eva, I have a premonition." Grandmother said, her voice strangely even. A single tear slid down her face. "I believe that this is only the beginning. Things are bad now, but it will only get worse

for the Jews." Grandmother gave my hand a squeeze. "Promise me to stay strong."

I promised. As I walked towards home, past destroyed shops and the blackened shell of what was once our synagogue. I stepped through broken glass, keeping my eyes on the sky. Whatever else the Nazis did, they could not ruin the sky. I felt a new feeling deep within myself. Perhaps it is even stronger than hate. A feeling of hope.

Deborah sat with the diary open on her lap, thinking of Grandma Eva. Eva was such a strong

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person. She survived concentration camps. She survived the loss of her family. She survived discrimination and loss of rights. Eva made it to America. She got a job and raised a family and knitted and baked cookies. Deborah's thoughts were interrupted by the slamming of a door. Her son was home. Deborah needed to talk to him. She wanted to help him with his bullying problem. Deborah gently closed the diary, tucking it under one arm.

The stairs creaked as Deborah descended from the hot, dusty attic hallway just outside of Max's bedroom. She knocked on his door.

"May I come in?" Deborah asked. Max grunted. Deborah took that as a yes. She opened the door and sat next to Max on his bed. His usually pristine room was strewn with papers and dirty laundry. "We need to talk." Deborah said, her voice firm.

"What is it, Mom?" Max muttered. Deborah took a deep breath and began to speak.

"Max, your great-grandmother was an amazing woman. She, like us, was a Jew. She lived in Germany in a time where Nazis told people what to think about her, her family, everyone. Just like those kids who post those things about you on Facebook." Max looked startled. He didn't think his mother knew about that. Deborah put one hand on Max's shoulder. "Your grandmother was a strong woman. She'd tell you to keep a stiff upper lip and keep going. As long as you, Max Levin, know the truth about yourself, it doesn't matter what others say. You have Grandma Eva's strength. I know you do. In the end, you'll be better off than those kids. Eva ended up having a better life than most Nazis, despite all of the hardship." Deborah finished her little speech, her eyes locked onto her son. Max took the diary from his mother and looked at it. Max put his arms around his mother, burying his face in her shoulder.

After a few moments, Max whispered something. "I will survive."

"I know you will." Deborah said, her voice full of emotion. She heaved a sigh of relief. Deborah knew Grandma Eva's story would help Max. Eva would have been so proud of her great-grandson.

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