

First Place Middle School Winner
Remember Me: An Anonymous Girl
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Girls are known for keeping diaries. We use them to keep up with the day's events or to express our emotions. Held privately in our diaries are our innermost thoughts. But what if your diary became more than just the place where you shared your excitements, fears, successes, and failures? What if it became the only living trace or your memory? This was the case for one young Polish girl living in the Lodz ghetto. In her diary she speaks of her mother, father, 17-year-old brother, and 16-year-old sister. We do not know her name or age, but because she states in her diary that she was not employed, we can assume that she was the youngest member of her family. Through her eyes we are introduced to the many unthinkable struggles of daily life in the Lodz ghetto.

Instead of a diary filled with the daily happenings of a typical adolescent, this young girl is faced with many adult issues every day. As she states in her diary, "there is no justice in the world, not to mention in the ghetto," she is clearly aware that the world surrounding her is not fair. She talks mostly about hunger and of the struggles involved with finding food for the family. "And this hunger. A struggle against death from starvation. Life is terrible, living conditions are abominable and there is no food." Although food in all ghettos was not sufficient, it was especially scarce in the Lodz ghetto. Because the Lodz ghetto was located in the part of Poland that was added into the German Empire and was meant to be completely free of Jews, it was completely separated from the ethnic German population and the Poles who still lived there. This meant that there was little to no opportunity to smuggle

food inside of the ghetto. Ghetto residents had to rely almost entirely on the food supply provided to the ghetto by the German authorities. It was never enough to adequately feed the population of the ghetto and was usually of very poor quality. This led to mass starvation and death due to malnutrition. As the food rations become increasingly meager, this young girl is keenly aware of the desperate situation. "Bread for seven days! Horror! When I went to the cooperative in the morning to get some bread, I was told it was for seven days. I shivered. I stood in line for a long time, getting cold, before they let us in. I received two loaves. There is nothing in the ghetto. One has to struggle for everything."

Although this young girl was not a working member of her family she did have major responsibilities. It was her job to do the household chores and to locate food for her family on a daily basis. Although she had food ration coupons, there was not always food to be had. She had to travel to different locations within the ghetto throughout the day to search for food. At one point when she hears that they are distributing kitchen rations, she rushes down to the cooperative with her ration booklets and reichmarks, and spent five hours waiting there. "The crowd was unbelievable. I couldn't breathe and people were almost piled up on one another. There were lice everywhere. I stood under the wall so they wouldn't get on me." She needed those rations to continue her family's survival and endured this just to receive a tiny bit of food for her family.

As the starvation in the ghetto intensifies, the diarist finds herself so hungry that she takes more than her portion of the family's rations. "Today they are distributing bread. I stood in line for three hours and got three loaves. When I came

back, I just had to take one piece.” She writes that her desperation for food at times even causes fights with her father. “Today I had a fight with my father. It happened because yesterday I weighed twenty decagrams of zacierki and then sneaked a spoonful. When my father came back he immediately noticed that some zacierki were missing. My father started yelling at me and he was right. I became very upset and cursed my father. What have I done? I regret it so much, but it can’t be undone. My father is not going to forgive me. How will I ever look him in the eyes?” She blames herself for not being able to control the urge to take food and feels that she is the reason why there is tension in her family. “We would be a happy family if I didn’t fight with everybody. All the fights are started by me. I must be manipulated by some evil force. I would like to be different, but I don’t have a strong enough will.”

Deportations from the ghetto were constantly on her mind as well. As a young girl she was having to experience the uncertainty of her family and friends remaining together as she witnesses ghetto residents being sent away on a regular basis. By September 1942, over 70,000 Jews and about 5,000 Roma had been deported to the Chelmo extermination camp where most were gassed in mobile gas vans. Although her writings show that deportations were feared, they also show that the fate of those being deported was not widely known. When she speaks of her sister’s friend Hania Huberman being deported she states that Hania applied for exemption from deportation because her father was too ill for the journey. She wrote, “I’m sure she will stay because her father cannot walk.” This shows that at this point the ghetto residents did believe the Nazi lie that they were being sent to farms as workers. This young girl believes that because Hania’s father could not

work he would not be sent away, when in reality, an inability to work was even more of a reason to be deported.

Throughout the unthinkable struggles that this anonymous girl faces during her time in the Lodz ghetto, she also radiates the longing for something that many children today take for granted. "When I look at the barbed wire that separated us from the rest of the world, my soul longs for freedom-like a bird in a cage. My eyes are filled with tears. I envy those birds that can fly freely." Her experience mirrors the experiences of so many children during the Holocaust. Approximately 1.5 million children were murdered at the hands of the Nazis, many of whom there is no trace of their memory. They struggled each day for survival hoping that the day would come where they could once again live in freedom. Although her identity is unknown to us, the anonymous girl wrote in her diary each day to document her life and the lives of others. She wrote as if to say, remember me. And remember all of us. We are the children.