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Mrs. Connolly

English 8A

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## Prologue

Can you imagine what life would have been like if you had to live during the Holocaust? Witnessing all of the killing, kidnapping, and cruel things that happened. Knowing that every second you're living, someone near you is most likely being murdered. Living through the rule of Hitler, seeing all of the destruction he caused. Family members being ripped away from one another. Having to stay hidden. Waking up every morning scared that something worse is going to happen. Hoping and praying that someone will come and stop all of the nonsense. Hitting rock bottom, suffering so much that you feel like there is nothing else to live for. Living in a country that makes you desperately want to leave. Can you imagine any of this? Take a few minutes, learn about what life was like, and put yourself in their shoes.

**To: Germany** <sup>II</sup>

I am writing you this letter to let you know that life here has become horrible. It is unbearable, the things I see and hear, I am ready to leave but I don't want to leave my family and all of the beautiful things Germany had to offer before the war behind... Why would the people vote someone in that would just destroy us all? Well, maybe we didn't know what he had in mind for this country, but we had an idea that he was a little bit crazy by the book he wrote while in prison.

My father has been taken away to fight in the war, my sister is gone, and I don't know where she is... We aren't Jews we're Lutheran, but we still have to hide from air raids and bombs. The Nazi's have become so bad that they try to take any girl they can get their hands on, and that really scares me. I wish you hadn't become such a horrible place. Why isn't God helping us, why is he allowing these mass murders go on? Why does Hitler feel the need to conduct all of this tragedy? No life is worth having to live this way. Waking up every morning terrified to see if you'll even make it all the way through the day, is probably the worst fear there is to have. Just why? Why do we have to live through this? Can it all just be over already? Please???

So No Thank You Germany. No Thank you for this horrible place you've forced us to live in. No Thank You for all of the tragedies you've left us to face. No Thank You for having to live through the loud booms the bombs make, that will be engraved in our hearing forever. No Thank You for putting Hitler in office, letting him destroy all of our policies, and millions of our lives. Most of all No Thank You for impacting my life in the most tragic way possible.

**From: Erna**

May 1, 1946

Dear Diary,

It has been about a week since my 7th birthday and I don't think it could have been worse. Let me tell you about it...

\*Flashback to April 21<sup>st</sup>\*

My mommy and daddy wake us up around 7:00AM to go down to our cellar and hide. They heard troops of Nazi's walking down the streets, and didn't want anything bad to happen to us. I understood what was going on, sort of, but I didn't want to go. I wanted to celebrate my birthday normally playing with my brothers and sister, but it didn't look like any of that was going to happen. While we were hiding in the cellar we heard a total of three bombs going off in nearby neighborhoods. All of the loud booms scared me to death. I immediately started crying. My mom held me close while my dad peaked out of the cellar door to see if anything was going on around us. I don't think he saw much other than smoke. Soon after that a warning came on the radio for an air raid that was about to happen. We all looked at each other scared for our lives, my parents tried to explain that everything would probably be okay, but that didn't stop me from being terrified. Next on the radio they yelled a threat to the Jew's, which was nothing new. I feel so bad for them I couldn't imagine the things they are going through right now...

\*Present Day May 1<sup>st</sup>\*

Its memories like those that make me remember that my family has it better than the Jews do. My life might not be the greatest but as of now I still am with my family. I am scared that someday one of the Nazi's will come to take me or my sister and I pray that that day will never come... The war has been going on for a while now and luckily none of my brothers have had to serve in it yet. I am so happy that I have this journal, I don't know what I would do without it. I feel bad for trying to talk to my family about my struggles, I don't really want to make them worry... Well my mommy has made me lunch so I better go! I definitely hope life will get better sooner than later. Talk to you soon!

~Erna

## The Dark Days

When we think about the Holocaust the first thing that we think about is the mass murder of the Jewish. There is so much more that went on other than the killing. Thousands and thousands of the people that made it out alive will forever be scarred by the things they witnessed during this horrible time period. So let's put ourselves in these peoples' shoes, and try to understand the things that happened.

My grandma, Erna (Fischer) Kientzle, lived in Germany during the Holocaust, and in her words she said, "It gives me chills remembering all of the horrible things that went on over there." Life for everyone during this time had been compromised. Whatever the norm was, you could forget it because Hitler was about to destroy it. If it doesn't say it loud and clear in the name itself then I don't know what does. "The word "Holocaust," from the Greek words "holos" (whole) and "kaustos" (burned), was historically used to describe a sacrificial offering burned on the altar" (History 1).

Hitler made all of these claims to win his power in Germany. "As economic conditions worsened, Hitler attracted a wider following. He was a spellbinding orator and a skilled organizer" (Berenbaum 18). Every German had hoped that Hitler could help the economy and better Germany as a whole, but this "hope" was soon destroyed. 1939 was just the beginning of all of this chaos. There was so much racism and discrimination against people with illnesses that couldn't even help it, "Nazi officials selected around 70,000 Germans institutionalized for mental illness or disabilities to be gassed to death in the so-called Euthanasia Program" (History 4). Can you imagine seeing one of your family members being taken away to their death just because they have an illness? Just think about that for a minute...

Things began to get more serious as time went on. The Nazi's were done searching through crowds of people to find the Jews so they figured out a new way to run this system. "Today an order was issued that from now on Jews have to wear a yellow star-shaped patch. The order tells exactly how big the star patch must be, and that it must be sewn on every outer garment, jacket or coat" (Holliday 104).

After the issue went out for the Jewish to start wearing these stars on their clothing at all times, things became a lot worse. They gathered all of the Jews together and threw them into vans, took them to be crammed into trains, to then be transported to either the ghetto or concentration camps. This meant no more freedom. This meant no more safety. This meant no more running and hiding. But this also meant that you might not make it out alive...

Transportation was nothing but torture for these people. "At every stop you could hear voices from the boxcars begging for air. Without fail a German officer would reply, 'You have everything you deserve.' At every station those who managed to open a window and beg the guards for help got either a bullet from a revolver or a burst from a machine gun for an answer" (Aroneau 4-5). They thought the Jewish deserved to die because Hitler had all of the Nazi's believing it was their fault for losing WWI. Once they would arrive at the concentration camps various things would happen like being thrown into the gas chambers, being stripped of clothing, beaten to a pulp, and numerous amounts of shootings. "Sometimes they'd say: 'There are too many Jews here.' Overnight 100 men would be killed. An SS guard would take care of that by either strangling them or bashing their heads in" (Aroneau 96).

The things that Hitler put into motion to do to these poor people was not right at all. We can't even *begin* to wrap our heads around the things they were put through, and the tragedies that occurred. In a book that documents diary entries called *Children in the Holocaust*, Janine

Phillips' entries struck me the most. "We can hear explosions by day and see the red sky at night. Several shells have landed in nearby fields... our house might become a target for Nazi tanks" (Holliday 5-6). There was not much to do to save yourself or your family, you either got lucky or you didn't because the guards couldn't do much to help you, even if they wanted to. "I was posted at guard at the edge of the area. Today my ears still ping with the cries of those unfortunate people, the young women with their children in their arms and the young girls, so full of life, who were murdered by these blood thirsty brutes, their eyes bulging under the influence of vodka that let them forget their crimes" (Aroneau 101).

Life was cruel during this time period and now a days I think we all take for granted the things we have to our disposal. The Holocaust was so much more than the tragic mass murder of the Jewish, it was a period in history that makes everyone's skin crawl. It is that time period that no one can fathom, or even begin to picture the things that happened and other people witnessed. It left millions and millions of people dead, but also left millions and millions of people scarred for life. We will never be able to imagine living in a time period where it is normal for racial threats to be made hourly. We will never be able to imagine what it was like to constantly hear the loud *booms* the bombs and many gunshots made. Will a tragedy like this ever occur again..? Let's hope for the sake of those lost, that it never will.

"I saw nothing but heard enough to last me a long time..." (Holliday 10).

April 4, 1949 <sup>III</sup>

**Dear Diary,**

I am now ten years old and understand things a whole lot better. The war is over now but the aftermath of it still isn't the best. I hate talking about the war because I want to understand why all of this horror occurred, but I am scared to ask mommy and daddy about it. Daddy gets very irritated if any of us ask about it because he had a rough time in the war. One day they came to our house and took mommy. When she came back she had bruises all over her and I didn't understand what happened until daddy told us that these mean men were not very nice to her, and are making him go fight in the front lines in Russia. I couldn't believe it... I was so upset and heartbroken that daddy had to leave us for that dumb war. But now that he is back and the war is over, he is different. He has bad dreams, worse than the rest of us do, that cause him to have to go to the therapist at the hospital. It worries me so much, I just want him to be okay... Sometimes mommy will talk to me about what happened and why we had to stay hidden for so long. Ursula, my older sister had to stay hidden the most because since she is old enough, the Russians would come take her from us and use her for god knows what... Alfred, my oldest brother, is old enough to realize what all was happening and I wish I was but then again I just wish all of this would end and be over. I don't like thinking about it and I don't like having to wonder why my family is so heart broken and stressed out about it all... Last night I had an awful dream. It was actually a memory, and it had me so frightened I woke up in tears... Let me tell you about it.

**\*Dream\***

We are all huddled in this tent, my mom holding us all close by. Bombs are being dropped all around us and I am terrified... I am so scared that one will land on our tent and we will all end up dead... But is it bad to say, we would all be free of this terror then? **Boom** a bomb dropped about a mile away. **Boom** another bomb dropped about a block away. **Boom** this bomb dropped 100 feet away on the tent right next to us. I heard mommy start to sob so I asked her what was wrong but she didn't answer. All she did was run to that tent and start digging through the dead people and I didn't understand why. I ran after her and kept asking her what happened and all she would do is shake her head and cry. Eventually she said "They're dead," so I asked who and she said her parents...

**\*Present Day April 4<sup>th</sup>\***

Till this day I will never understand why that bomb was dropped, and why my grandparents were caught under that tent. I will never get to meet them... This is such a cruel cruel place.

Talk to you soon.  
~ Erna

I

Lay        Here

Cornered        In This

Little        Closet.

The Guard        Breaks

Through        The Door.

**BOOM BOOM**        I'M CAUGHT.

I        Am

Taken,        Thrown

Into        This

White        Van,

And        Beaten to

Shreds.        **BOOM**

**BOOM**        PAIN.

Held at        Gunpoint,

I        Am

Sure That I'm        Nearing the End.

The Nazi        SS Guard

Gets Ready        To Pull the

Trigger,        I Breathe

My Last        Breath.

**BOOM**        **BOOM**.

I'M FREE.

## Every Star Has a Price

I hear the loud boom of the door being broken down... Oh no... I bury myself under a pile of IV clothes hoping and hoping they won't check this closet. "If there is anyone in this household surrender yourself immediately. We can do this the easy way or the hard way," an SS guards yells. Oh no... I hear their footsteps getting closer and closer and before I know it the closet door is torn open and the pile of clothes are ripped apart revealing my hiding spot. "What is your name and how old are you?" The guard had a murderous look to him. "I-I uh, I'm seventeen years old. My name is Ana," I said trembling from the thought of what they were going to do to me. He grabbed me by my hair, dragged me outside, and threw me as hard as he could on the pavement bashing my head off of it in the process. All I see is black...

Opening my eyes groggily, I feel a surge of pain rushing to my skull. Ow, what the hell happened? I look around and I am on a train filled with Jews. We're all crammed in this tiny little box car, with hardly any air to breathe... I ask the person next to me, "Hey where are we going?" She looks at me sympathetically and says, "Auschwitz my dear..." Oh. My. God. I mean what did I expect to happen? I am as good as dead now.

We arrive at the concentration camp, they slide the doors open, and force us all to get out by holding us at gunpoint. They separate us all into different groups. Mothers and their crying babies, little children confused as ever, us teenagers thrown together, the middle aged men and women, and lastly all of the elderly are together. The murderous SS guard that found me earlier, took our group and started walking us towards the gas chamber. I look all around me and there are ditches filled with

dead bodies. Trenches dug, with people down in them about to receive a bullet through the head.

Millions of people dead and millions of people scared to death for what is about to happen to them.

These guards have no remorse and no respect. They take us one by one leading us into the gas chamber. Its either you make it out barely alive, or you're just dead. I step up to the guard, it is my turn in line, and he looks at me with a certain kind of disgust. He looks at me as if I am his prey and it completely grosses me out. He rips us all of our clothes, and pushes us towards the chamber. At this moment I knew I had to make my decision. Run or suffer through this torture.

So I run for my life. I run so fast my legs go numb, and I feel like I'm moving in slow motion. My adrenaline is pumping through my veins, I feel like I can make it away. I get to the fence and I notice that there is barbed wire on the top of it but that isn't stopping me. I hear the guards closing in on me. I'm half-way up the fence when I feel a sharp pain in my lower calf. He has shot me. The murderous guard shot me in the leg, and I have no other choice but to drop to the ground and pray. Pray that god will watch over me, and help me through this rough time.

Pain is all I feel. He has punched me in the face, kneed me in the stomach numerous times, and I have a gunshot wound on my leg. I start to go numb from this overwhelming amount of pain but just then, he makes me stand in front of the trench. I knew what was about to happen. They shoot people that stood in front of this trench. There was nothing to do. I couldn't run, and I couldn't hide anymore. I just hope this horrible horrible man will find peace someday. I look up to see him getting ready to pull the trigger. He has the gun to my forehead. "May you find peace and forgiveness for the things you have done," I say to him. He scoffs and pulls the trigger.

Boom. I am finally free.

December 24, 1954<sup>V</sup>

**Dear Diary,**

Today is a very bitter day. It is Christmas Eve and I just found out that I have an older sister named Irmgard. I am so angry that Mom just now decided to tell me about this because I would have tried to see her a long time ago. She showed me a picture of her and she was such a pretty lady, I'm so upset that I will never be able to see her. Mom thought it was a better idea to keep it from us, but Ursula found the photo in her room and asked her about it. Dad is still not doing well, he has started drinking more than he used to. I think that it helps him with the horrible memories he was left with from the war.

Now that I am old enough to understand the things that went on, mom tries to talk to me about why dad is so messed up from the war but it still scares me. I could never imagine living the life of one of those poor Jews. Life was hard enough not being one of them. Hiding all of the time, seeing my family being taken and beaten, dad going to war and coming back different, and losing a sister to the Russians.

Things still aren't safe around here. I can't walk the streets alone without being scared. They haven't done much rebuilding yet either. There are still buildings crumbled all over the place, and you can still see the places where the bombs were dropped. It's very saddening.

It is Christmas Eve and I am trying to be happy but all I can think about is my oldest sister... I want to meet her and get to know what she is like. She was stuck on the other side of the Berlin wall and never made it back... These Christmas days will now forever come with the thought of not having her around, but maybe someday I will try and go find her. I want more than this life in Germany. I want to explore the world and get away from all of the pain and sadness. I don't want to have to worry about not being safe and scared that something bad will happen. Everywhere I look I am reminded of the fear of a bomb dropping on my family, or the wincing every time I heard the **boom** of a gunshot. I am reminded of Hitler, the evil man that caused all of this destruction. I feel like I am trapped in a world of sadness and I need to escape...

~Erna

destructive behavior

painful anxiety

ultimately

unable to control

his violent hands

destructive feelings

resentment and rage

an

attack of anger

Hitler is

Indeed

mad

(Diamond 3).

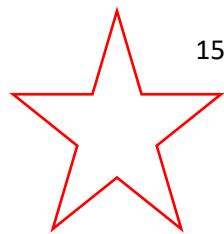
June 28, 1956

Dear Diary,

I have made my mind up. I am leaving Germany. I met this wonderful man in the military, he is from America, and says that life there is so much better than here. The streets are clean, and the buildings are pretty. He says there are so many sights to be seen, and so many places to visit there. It sounds wonderful. I already bought my ticket to set sail to America and I leave today! I am seventeen years old, now old enough to make it on my own, so I decided to better my life and go to the land of freedom. My bags are packed and I have said my goodbyes to my family. I am going to miss them so much but we will keep in touch. They could even come and visit me if they wanted to!

I am aboard the ship with a bunch of other people that are doing the same thing I am. America sounds amazing. I know the trip there will probably be a long one but I will enjoy the whole journey, knowing that I will be going to a better place. There will be so many different opportunities for me and I will no longer be around all of the sad sights left behind from the war. I no longer will have to fear the scarring sound of the boom. I won't have to fear for my life, I won't wake up in the middle of the night scared that something bad is going to happen, and I won't have to walk around feeling guilty about all of the lives lost. Well, I am on this journey to a new and better life and all I can say is that I hope it is as great as it sounds... I'll let you know soon! Until then.

~Erna



15

All of the bad things in which occurred, made life so unbearable.<sup>VI</sup>

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ Millions of people were held prisoner, which  
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ for them, was horrible. The killings were massive  
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ and the bombs made loud booms. I once felt  
☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ captive and thought my life was doomed. I  
soon made the decision to flee. Leaving was very bittersweet, but I  
desperately wanted to be free. I knew life in America would be neat,  
and that I would soon have to adapt. I will no longer have to live in misery  
and I will no longer feel trapped. I am so excited to live this new life of liberty.



September 4, 1956

**Dear Diary,**

I have been in America for a while now and life couldn't be better. I am no longer afraid to walk the streets alone, or fall asleep at night because I know I'm safe here. I am eighteen and married to the man that told me how great life would be here. We have explored many places and seen very many beautiful sights. I am living in Florida where the white sand beaches are pretty and bright. When I first got here I had to take this special test to become a citizen (which was very difficult), and I wanted to apply for a visa so I could travel to Russia to meet my oldest sister. But, as soon as I mentioned the idea, everyone I knew and was friends with, told me no. They said it was too much of a risk and there was no guarantee that I would make it back. I decided against it and since then, have been taking it day by day. Not too long ago it was the Fourth of July. It was a holiday that I had never heard about and was never celebrated in Germany. Needless to say, I didn't know what to expect....

\*Flashback to July 4<sup>th</sup>\*

A loud boom went off and it immediately took me back to my life in Germany. I panicked and ran. It felt like my throat was closing up, and I was going to pass out. I looked up to the sky to see bursts of light and smoke. "Oh no what is happening... Not here too," I thought until I realized this was no bombing. It was a boom of celebration. The booms that were once scary, are no longer to fear.

\*Present Day\*

Although this celebration frightened me, I realized it was a celebration for freedom, liberty, and peace. Reminding me, that America really was the better choice. The best life-altering choice I have ever made.

~Erna



In this photo is my Grandma, Erna (Fischer) Kientzle. Born April 21, 1939, in Sonneberg, Germany. She lived during the tragic time known as the Holocaust. Witnessing many things like her family members being sent to war, and tossed into vans and trains to be taken to who knows where. Squished in tents of people and witnessing the dropping of a bomb on the tent that was right next to her, that boom engraved in her memory forever. Her Grandmother and Grandfather being killed in that tent and seeing her mother go looking for them, hoping they would still be alive. Having to hide her older sister from the Russians<sup>VII</sup> because they would come after her to be taken and raped. Losing her oldest sister because she was trapped on the other side of the Berlin wall because the Russians took her and beat her. This is the life my grandma lived in Germany. Can you imagine it?



These photos show my great grandma, Gertrude, and my Great grandpa, Carl. They had a very rough life... During the war, the Nazi's came and kidnapped my great grandma and beat her so they could get her husband to fight in the front lines in Russia. They finally released my great grandma, and during the time my great grandpa was away, she had to protect her children and hide her daughters from the Russians. When my great grandpa was released he had many mental problems including PTSD, so he spent most of his time in the psych part of the hospitals. Could you imagine?



My great grandma originally had six children total but she ended up separated from many of them. This photo shows Gertrude, Carl, their children: Alfred, Carl Heinz, Ursula, Erna (my grandma), and Peter. One big happy family that stayed united through the war. From having to stay hidden and protected from bombs dropping all over, and being taken by the terrible SS guards. But at the end of the day they made it through holding each other close. Though life threw them all many curve balls, they had each other to lean on and that is what got them through. Family is always there for one another when times get tough. Think about how hard it was... Just imagine...



**To: America**

I am writing you this letter to let you know that you really are the greatest country of all. You are the melting pot of all different races, cultures, and generations. You are the best choice for anyone wishing to live their life in a better place, which was me at one point. You've offered me so much more than Germany has. You have been the only option for many people that needed their freedom. If life somewhere else broke people, they look to America for answers.

You are the land of liberty, peace, and freedom. Germany once had me convinced that I would forever live a sad miserable life, but as soon as I heard about all of the amazing things America had to give, I had to go. You have shown me there is such a better way to live my life. You let all of the people that live here practice whatever religion they want to. You don't discriminate on who can live here based on their race or culture. People don't have to wear a certain thing on their clothes just because of their religion, like they did back in Germany. You've given us the freedom to come and go as we please, and you've given us the freedom of speech.

So Thank You America. Thank You for making my life better in so many more ways, than I can explain. Thank You for showing me that I no longer have to fear the booms. Thank You for giving me freedom. Last but not least, Thank You for impacting my life in the best way possible.

**From: Erna**

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## Endnotes

<sup>I</sup> This is a photo of a cigarette case my grandma kept from Germany. It shows all of the little cities in Deutschland, including the town my grandma lived in after the war was over, Schleswig.

<sup>II</sup> I chose to open my paper with a dear Germany letter to show the impact on people's lives. I wanted to show all of the horrible things that went on, and how it had a negative impact on a person's life. The letter is there to show that during the Holocaust, Germany drove many people to want to flee, and get away from all of the bad things occurring and to hint towards immigrating.

<sup>III</sup> All of my connecting pieces are diary entries. Throughout my whole paper I incorporate the word *boom* to connect it all, and give the readers a visual term to put things into perspective.

<sup>IV</sup> If you read my poem and my flash fiction together, you'll notice that they are the same story. My poem is about a young Jewish girl that is separated from her family and taken by the Nazi's. I wanted to write my flash fiction as the story behind my poem, and tell the whole story behind what happened to give my readers more knowledge on what being captured was like. I wanted to give the other perspective of someone suffering but ending up free as well.

<sup>V</sup> Most of the stories in my diary entries are true. My grandma has filled me in over the years about all of the gory details. Her sister being taken by the Russians. True. Her father fighting in the war, and coming back with PTSD. True. Witnessing the bombing on the tent right next to her, her grandparents dying in that bombing. True. I wanted to incorporate all of these stories into my diary entries to show the emotional destruction it would do to a person.

<sup>VI</sup> I wrote this extra poem to show the change of attitude, to transition it from living a bad life to a good one.



<sup>VII</sup> This is the oldest sister to my grandma. Her name is Irmgard, and she lived a tragic life burdened by knowing she'd never see her family again because she was stuck in Russia. Who knows, maybe she lived a good life. But that is something that I will never know.