

## SECOND PLACE HIGH SCHOOL PROSE

### *A Woman of Valor*

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Testimony: Jadzia Stern

The Nazis tried to strip Jadzia Stern of her Jewishness. They denied her her culture and her heritage. I will not do the same. As I viewed Jadzia's testimony, a pit grew in my stomach and deepened with every horrific incident of antisemitism and genocide she recounted. And as I scoured my mind for a word or phrase that could even begin to summarize Jadzia's bravery, I only felt worse. Something was viscerally wrong about my list: every word was written in English.

Though no singular word or phrase in any language could ever truly capture Jadzia's incredible story of perseverance in the face of horrific crimes against humanity, it is infinitely more meaningful to choose something in Hebrew—the language that connects Jadzia and the millions of other Jews across the planet, myself included, both to one another and to God. אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל (Eshet Chayil) is a Hebrew phrase that translates into English as “woman of valor.” Jadzia Stern could not be more perfectly nor more beautifully represented by this phrase.

Experiencing antisemitism from a young age, Jadzia prevailed through her ordeals with grace and courage. She was forced to move into a Ghetto at the young age of 12, where she witnessed nothing but pain from her family and the other Jews around her. Jadzia and her sisters were prevented from going to school. Their family was plagued by disease. They lived their lives under the authoritative glare of the Nazi party until 1942, when Jadzia was captured and sent to the death camp Auschwitz.

Words cannot describe the horrors that occurred in Nazi death and labor camps. Words like torture, starvation, experimentation, murder, and depravity only scratch the surface. I will never understand the crimes against humanity that occurred during the Holocaust in the same way that a survivor will, but I do understand perfectly from her interview that Jadzia exemplified the phrase אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל throughout her experience.

Valor is powerful. It is utter courage and strength in the face of adversity. אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל comes from a poem in the Torah that describes the many characteristics of the אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל. Jadzia Stern exemplifies every trait of a woman of valor. The following are merely three of thirty-one examples of valor. “She sets her mind on a field and acquires it”; “Her loins are girded with strength, and her arms are mighty”; “She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is upon her tongue.” Through horrific adversity, Jadzia remained a woman of valor; she held on to her inner strength with an iron grip. She fought valiantly for freedom, not only for herself but for the many suffering individuals around her.

From the words of the אִשֶּׁת חַיִּיל poem itself, Jadzia, “many women have displayed valor, but you rise above them all.”