

## SECOND PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL PROSE

*“The Most Dramatic Item”—So Must We All*

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Survivor Testimony: Leopold Page

It was January 1945 and frigid cold when two sealed cattle cars carrying 136 Jewish men from the evacuated Golleschau labor camp arrived at Brinnlitz, the camp connected to Oskar Schindler’s “munitions factory.” Leopold Page, in his video testimony, recalls opening the sealed cars to find 16 of the men already dead and the rest emaciated and frostbitten. Before the SS camp commandant could send them back, Schindler paid 600 marks each to add the men to his labor roster even though they were too sick to work. His wife, Emilie, procured medicine on the black market and patiently nursed them back to health. As for the dead, Schindler was ordered to burn them, but he refused, declaring, according to Page, “In my factory, you don’t burn the body. We bury them.”

In a religious ceremony led by Rabbi Levitoff, the deceased were buried in a plot of land purchased by Schindler as 10 people recited the Kaddish. Page calls the burial “the most dramatic item.”

During the war, Leopold Page fought in the Polish army, was wounded at the San River, and escaped after being taken prisoner. He traded on the black market, entered the Krakow ghetto in 1941, and survived its liquidation in 1943. He worked in the garage of SS Commander Amon Goeth and experienced his cruelty. He saw Oskar Schindler bribe soldiers, lie, and even relocate his entire factory to protect his Jewish workers.

Having experienced such extraordinary events, why was Page struck by the burial of the Golleschau prisoners?

Perhaps it was because Schindler showed commitment. Although Schindler profited from Jewish suffering at the beginning of the war, he eventually began using his wealth, charm, and Nazi affiliation to minimize it. By 1945, he had spent nearly his entire fortune protecting his workers. There was no benefit to burying the Golleschau dead, but Schindler did it anyway.

Perhaps it was because Schindler aligned himself with the Jewish people. Though he did not share their faith, he did share their humanity. He acknowledged their concerns. By burying the dead, Schindler honored Jewish belief and tradition.

Perhaps it was because Leopold Page truly knew Oskar Schindler. Page says that the Schindlers “took it upon themselves to play angels” to the Golleschau prisoners—but Page knew that Oskar Schindler was no angel. Schindler gambled, drank, and had affairs. He was a flawed human being, but at that moment, his actions were exemplary.

And that is the challenge posed by Leopold Page’s memory.

If Schindler could use his position and fortune to help his Jewish workers, shouldn’t I use my gifts and advantages to help the bullied and abandoned? If Schindler could identify with the Jewish people and offer shelter in such a bleak time, shouldn’t I stand with those who need support and offer my presence without judgment?

I should do these things.

I can do these things.

As a witness to a witness, I must do these things. So must we all.

So must we all.