

FIRST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL POETRY

The Chance

Hannah Fung, Grade 8

Pioneer Middle School, Tustin, CA

Teacher: Heather Tolliver

Testimony: Engelina Billauer

Mounds of bodies: names unknown, scattered on the ground like worthless stones
They were never teenagers.
'We're going to make soap out of you.' Yet freedom found us first, a camp full of rags
hanging off skin and bones...
We were never teenagers.
'You will see them later,' he said. And yet, we never saw our parents again.
Shipped like pieces of machinery, unclaimed baggage, from camp to camp.
I was never a teenager.
Gone were precious years of youth after the war. Deprived
of the simple joy of learning, textbooks were replaced by the brutal teacher Life
They never got to be teenagers.
Too young to understand what we witnessed, but too old to forget
what we experienced. We were in between young and old, and yet...
We never got to be teenagers.
The loftiest dreams I had—a piece of bread, a toilet to myself, a nice, clean bed.
I never got to be a teenager.

*She never got to be and was never a teenager.
She endured hell on earth to tell her story,
a story that bids me, bids us, to speak up in the face of injustice—before it's too late.
Stand up for others when they're attacked with hate,
Take care of one another, give each other aid,
Make sure no one is lonely, and that no one is afraid.*

*I am a teenager.
I, too, have witnessed death. But I knew their names, and mourned their loss.
I have opportunities to live that others did not.
I have the home and family where others have none.
I have a life that I want to live the best I can.
I have the chance to be between young and old; to figure out who I am.
I have dreams, big dreams, much bigger than a piece of bread, and
I have the capability to fulfill Engelina's wish: "...that it never happens again."*