

FIRST PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL PROSE

Mourning Silence

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Survivor Testimony: Kurt Messerschmidt

As the first rays of sunlight timidly peeked through the shroud of gloom blanketing Berlin, a young man, Kurt Messerschmidt, began his journey through Friedrichstraße. The sun's rays illuminated the shattered remnants of storefront windows, casting haunting reflections on the shards glimmering on the streets. The once bustling avenues now murmured tales of terror from the night before. The sinister smirks alighting the Sturmabteilung's patrols' faces were the only witnesses of the brutality of that night. The Nazis had fulfilled their threat.

Every push against his pedal was a drumbeat of defiance. He vowed to himself never to join the ranks of those submissively kneeling by their storefronts, praying for help, or to join those who hid, peering through their half-closed shutters at the desolation of their peers. He refused to let the Nazis see his despair.

He kept pedaling for several miles over broken glass, torn clothes, and the remnants of the hopes and dreams of Jewish families. His bike, wobbling from the splinters of glass grazing its tires,

Until he stopped. A crowd of civilians and sniggering Sturmabteilung members surrounded a tiny cigar shop. Kneeling at the storefront, on his quivering, bent knees, the gentle old owner stooped as he gingerly gathered glass with his quaking, gnarled hands. Like a mourner amidst a graveyard, he painstakingly collected each fragment so carefully that onlookers wondered if they were a hidden treasure, for he treated each one as though it were a tombstone, each marking the loss of innocence, trust, and justice.

Piece by piece. Shard by shard. Splinter by splinter.

The old man bloodied his hands. The only noise was the shuffling of his feet and his labored breathing. Yet, no one moved. No one blinked. No one wavered at this sickening sight. Until Kurt shoved his way forward. Casting aside his bike, he too knelt. He didn't kneel in submission to the leering Sturmabteilung's members; he knelt in defiance. Delicately, he plucked shards from the ground, refusing to wince even as fragments pierced his skin. They knelt like this, somberly mourning the loss of their nationalist pride, the disrespect of their religion, and the disregard for their fellowship as humans.

Now, the civilians there might say the silence suppressed them, preventing them from taking action, however, then, it was their "silence [that] did the harm."

Silence penetrates society. By remaining silent, we conform. However, this only ostracizes ourselves from our true identities. By blending in, we stand out. Stand out as Frankensteins pieced together with our shattered morals, lost convictions, and the imposed ideals of society. The constant hope of everyone, myself included, to be part of the popular group has inundated society. I'm inspired to escape from the cage of society's ideals. As students, everyone wants to be popular, but I've learned I don't need to be popular amongst others—just fine with myself. While it's easy to conform, you lose your true self, and like shattered glass, once broken, it's impossible to piece together.