

## SECOND PLACE HIGH SCHOOL PROSE

*The Power of a Promise*  
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Canyon High School, Anaheim  
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Testimony: Gerda Weissmann Klein

*Promise.* A simple word that holds an extraordinary amount of power.

On September 3, 1939, the Nazis invaded Bielsko, Poland, where Gerda Weissmann and her family lived. This invasion was the start of the Nazi occupation that would soon change almost everything in Gerda's life. One thing that remained the same was her father's love for her, shown to her in a request to keep a promise that would ultimately save her life.

Neither Gerda nor her father knew the impact that their promise of love would have. The Weissmanns learned of another family who committed suicide together to escape the persecution so many Jewish families were facing. At the time, Gerda wished her family would do the same to end all of their sufferings. Her father saw her contemplating this idea as she looked out the window, and told her, "What you are thinking is wrong, it's cowardly, it's terrible. Promise me you are never going to do that." When Gerda did not answer, her father turned her around and implored her to vow to him. She promised, not knowing how life-saving that pledge to her father would be.

At the innocent age of 18, Gerda was torn from her family and sent alone to a forced labor camp, unaware that her mother, father, and brother would be murdered by the Nazis before the end of the war. Gerda was required each day to endure horrendous work. The nights were frigid and harsh. Filled with sorrow and feeling forlorn, Gerda was isolated from all she had known and loved.

After an especially cruel day of hard labor, Gerda felt she was unable to go on. She stood staring at the railroad tracks, alone, pondering how quickly it could all be over. Pondering how her despair would be gone. If she could just throw herself on the tracks. She stood ready to jump. Ready to take her own life. Ready to end her heartache. Ready for it all to be over. At that moment she felt a pain in her neck. The words of love that sealed the promise she had made to her father were in her mind once again, just as vivid as the day she made it. The love that sealed their promise compelled her to walk away from those tracks. The love that sealed their promise gave her the hope to keep living. The love that sealed their promise came back to Gerda at one of her darkest times and saved her life.

Words of love can reach through space and time. Love can shine through despair and heartache as it did for Gerda. The promise of love between Gerda and her father made all the difference. The difference between giving up and living. The difference between life and death. A promise made through love has the power to save a life.

*Love.* A simple word that holds an extraordinary amount of power.