

*Strips of Paper*  
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Survivor Testimony: Sally Roisman

Seated on a chipped stool in art class, I tear up coupons and magazines to use for my paper mache project. Rip, tear. Rip, tear. It becomes a soundless melody that fills my ears, droning on and on, merging with the background music and endless talking of my peers. Suddenly I come across an ad for a missing person -- a young girl, only a few years older than me, and without hesitation I do what has become habit -- I rip it up. Oh well, I think. Not missing a beat, I dip the paper into the glue and plaster it onto my bowl. Another indistinct face has been embedded among countless others, each of their meaningful stories lost under more strips of paper. I gave no thought for the girl or her family, what her story was, and how it came to be. To me, it was something I could never relate to.

So when I, a high schooler in 2018 with an all too normal life was told to relate to a Holocaust survivor, I regarded it as a rather tedious job. I did not personally know any survivors. The next day, I prepared myself for a long two hours when I opened Sally Roisman's testimony:

It is 1945. I march along with Roisman as she is forced to go on a death march with two of her sisters. Behind us the sound of shots resonate in the air, signaling yet another face on a paper, their stories never to be heard again. It is 1945. I follow Roisman to a concentration camp called Bergen Belsen, where she is assigned to work in a kitchen away from her sisters, her family. It is 1945. The prisoners are given such meager rations, many take action into their own hands to survive. Her own sisters risk their already endangered lives by taking clothing out of their workplace and exchanging it with others for food. In the kitchen I watch Roisman stuff small potatoes into the lining of her coat. I walk out the door with her, praying she won't be caught. "Prisoners who stole paid with their lives." One day I stop abruptly as she notices a large pile of raw potatoes lying on the ground. A German guard stands over them, watching. Waiting. As they file out of the kitchen, one of the prisoners--a man--bends down, wanting to pick up a potato. The guard, seeing this, shoots the man on the spot. Another story lost. I am appalled by the actions of this guard, who exhibits no sign of remorse, not a trace of sympathy found in him as he smirks.

It is 2018 once more, and suddenly I find myself unable to just smother this story under piles of shredded newspaper. I am no longer be content living a life in which I refused so blatantly to acknowledge the millions of stories buried with their carriers' deaths. I was born in a generation that has been desensitized to the atrocities committed by the individuals around us, but this does not mean I must continue to live in it. And indeed, why should I? Should we continue to produce a generation so blinded with indifference towards the suffering of humanity? The world is a journal scrawled with misery. A few have the courage to open the journal. Daily newspaper headlines highlight conflicts occurring in this world. Genocide. Terrorism. Massacre. Yet too often, many turn the page to a simpler headline. Eventually every story will be dismissed, just another sliver of newspaper to be used in an art project. Rather than placing down flawless strips of paper atop the scraps of the forgotten ones, we can choose to tear them off, to reveal the memories buried beneath. We have been given the chance to patch together a new story from these shredded pieces and deliver it across the world. We can become messengers of memory--we can hold open the journal and read it. And now, all that's left to do is to do it.

The choice is in our hands, whether we decide to hold onto it or not.