

First Prize Prose, High School Division

*Voice That Transcends Time*

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Survivor Testimony, Paula Lebovics

From a childhood shattered into shards of recollections rises a strong voice. A voice that reverberates with insightful meaning. A voice that compels us to listen. A voice that makes us remember. This is the voice of Paula Lebovics.

At the mere age of five, Paula was swept up in the horrors of war. She was forced to develop an instinct for survival because of her harsh circumstances. Wherever Paula went, she tried to be shrouded from view, unseen by prying eyes. Thus, it is no wonder that her awe-inspiring story of survival takes on the tone of a mature adult. Yet, Lebovics was only a child. She was a child whose youth was stripped away from her. Her remark, "I used to wet every night," only emphasizes the immense fear she experienced at such a young age. The injustices she had to face show how much damage intolerance can bring.

As I listened to Paula's testimony, I was horrified when she described her close encounter with death. Having come out of her hiding place, Paula was spotted by a Ukrainian soldier who turned her over to the SS. After forcefully questioning her about other hiding places, the SS officer took out his revolver and pointed it at her. In a twist of fate, she was saved when another SS officer approached and said the bullet was too valuable to be used to kill her.

As I listened to this testimony, many thoughts crossed my mind. I questioned how an innocent child can come to be threatened so easily. How was it that a precious life was dependent on the value of a bullet? It was then that the meaning of intolerance struck me more strongly than ever before. In Paula's case, intolerance took the form of a revolver pointed at her head. Due to unforgiving intolerance, countless lives were taken. Paula could easily have been another precious life ended by intolerance.

Now that I have heard Paula's story, I am forever influenced. I am influenced in that I now know how destructive intolerance can be. The scene of a small girl with a revolver pointed at her is forever etched into my heart. Yet, I know that remembering is not enough. To prevent future events similar to the Holocaust, I must take action. Paula did this by imbuing listeners all over the world with her voice and her memories. As for me, I believe that I am taking the first step by writing my own reflection on Paula's testimony. I believe that as Elie Wiesel says, "Words can sometimes, in moments of grace, attain the quality of deeds," and so I hope my words too will influence readers.

Paula's voice transcends generations to tell of her memories. I know that I am one of the many to be influenced by her. The voice that compels me to remember. Thank you, Paula Lebovics.