

The Fourteenth Annual Holocaust Art and Writing Contest

First Place, Middle School Prose

*Sing a Song, A Song of Life*

Kaitlyn Pham

St. Columban School, Garden Grove

Teacher: Thelma Anselmi

Survivor Testimony: Ursula Levy

A simple song is such a powerful thing. It plays a tune of hope and creativity even in the darkest of times when there is no hope to be found. Ursula Levy learned this at a young age when her mother's soothing voice would sing the song: "I Danced with You into Heaven, the 7th Heaven of Love." Even with the prospect of heaven, death still seems so dark and mysterious. Yet, as the song says, perhaps death isn't so horrific and daunting but instead it is a beautiful thing, a part of life; after death, we will dance with each other into this beautiful and grand paradise, into this ballroom that is heaven. That is the power of song. It has the power to turn something that is so feared and dreaded into something elegant and auspicious.

Unlike others, Ursula thought of death as dancing into a new beginning, a new life. This change of thought was brought about by a song, a simple song sung by her mother. Songs were a constant in Ursula's life. It began in Germany before the war with her mother singing, telling of the grand ballroom that is heaven. In hiding in a convent in the Netherlands, during a period of worry and fear, Ursula listened to the cheerful tunes sung by the other children. Later, separated from her brother, locked away behind barbed wire in a concentration camp, she witnessed people being loaded onto carts headed toward Auschwitz, but despite the promise of death that awaited them, they would always find their voice to sing. Ursula saw music as the embodiment of creativity, the expression of oneself and that is exactly why it is so powerful. It is originality and innovation that gives the human heart hope and bravery even in the darkest of times.

Ursula Levy reminds me that it is the beauty of creativity that can open my eyes to the wonders of this world. It can turn something forlorn into something beautiful. It turned death into a dance of life and hope. It turned a period of anxiety into one of childish play. It turned the looming threat of death into a portrait of bravery and courage. It is creativity that can turn something gruesome into something radiant and it is the words of a Holocaust survivor that can inspire such creativity from a young student, like me, to carry on the song of the survivors. Ursula has inspired me to turn every sad song into a hopeful one and never let creativity die in my world. I have learned, from her words, that when I let my creativity flow through music, words, and art, I can add a brushstroke of color to a dark portrait, insert a happy tune to a gloomy ballad, and introduce words of hope in a dreary poem. This is the power of creativity.