

Betrayal

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Teacher: Darcy Blake

Survivor Testimony: Selene Bruk

I watch attentively as Selene Bruk tells her story of pain and heartbreak. I see her clench her jaw in an effort to remain strong. I observe how she must pause her story occasionally to fight back tears. Bruk spins a web, and tangled up inside are memories of pain, familial loss, and near-death experiences. But one memory in particular stands out. I absorb as much as I can, furiously scribbling notes while also attempting to not miss any details of the memory. Oblivious to my writing, on the other side of a screen Bruk relays to the world the tale of how Poland, her homeland, turned its back on her during the Holocaust. I find myself drawn in to her story, placing myself in Bruk's shoes. I blink back tears as I see Bruk's memories play through my head like a horrifying movie I can't tear my eyes away from.

Nazis pluck Jews from their hiding places and force them onto cattle cars, islands of humiliation and shame. They are shipped first to Danzig, then Stutthof, and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau. In Danzig, jeering, pointing children surround them. Only a fifth grader herself, Bruk can't understand why children, just like her, make fun of her for being herself. On the day she had left her home, Bruk felt as if her community had plunged a knife into her back. But this new emotional agony caused the knife to be twisted, creating even more pain. Betrayal stung. Tears streamed down Bruk's face as harsh words surrounded her, poisoning the air with loathing.

I look away and am faced with yet another horror. Headlines tell a modernized version of this story. LGBTQ+ children are being disowned and mistreated by their society simply for being who they are. *What's wrong with being yourself?* I find myself constantly asking the same questions and never finding an answer. *As students, many kids are taught to be true to themselves. But when they do, they are verbally and sometimes physically attacked. Where is the logic in that?* I begin to understand how Bruk felt. I walk outside, my pride emblazoned on the shirt my aunts gave me. **Love is love.** I practically feel glares from multiple directions, but I hold my head high, knowing that the most important people in my life support me. I think of Selene and empathize. I spend time with my friend, walking, talking, and trying to ignore the blatant looks of disgust surrounding us. But at the same time, hidden in a corner, I find acceptance. I see the others who are like me, the people who are different and still hold their head high because we know we are worth just as much as anyone else. We are all human beings and deserve to be treated as such. Humanity must learn to accept that all people are special in their own right, and nobody has the right to change that. To spread this message, everyone has a task. To prevent spreading betrayal from another Holocaust, we must all become messengers of memory.