

If/When
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I watched you tell your story,
I held your hand through times of hate, fear and dread,
Time and time again, you found hope,
I watched as you were forced into a crowded cattle car with thousands of other Jews,
You found hope in an old woman with a golden locket,
I felt you grip your sister's hand when you arrived at Auschwitz,
I watched you look into her eyes and tell her, "You hold onto me no matter what happens."
You found hope in never letting go of young Klara.
I heard the officer say, "There go your parents, soon you will join them."
I felt time pass agonizingly slow at the death camp,
I watched you move to a neighboring camp and meet your sister at that metal fence every day,
Every day you hoped your Klara had not been taken from you,
You hoped she would find you again when she got out,
When peace was restored.
When you could hug your family again,
When everything went back to what it was,
When you could live your life without being persecuted for what you believe in,
When the threat of death vanished,
I felt Klara's small hand as she reached through the metal fence day after day,
And then she was gone,
That was the day all your *whens* turned to *ifs*
If peace was restored,
If you could hug your family again,
If you could live your life without being persecuted for what you believe in,
If the threat of death vanished,
Klara was taken from you along with everything you held dear,
The day your *whens* turned into *ifs* was the day my hope wavered,
I thought for certain you would give in- give up,
But you held onto your hopes,
You held on through the death march,
Through cold, and pain, and grief,
You held on until you were liberated by the Soviet soldiers,
And the impossible had become possible,
You were finally free of the Nazis' tyranny,
And by some odd coincidence, you found your brother,
And you found hope in his smile,
And then in Allentown, Pennsylvania,
And in a new start,
And *I* am inspired to never lose hope, to fight against injustice, to stop prejudice,
And to never let my *whens* turn to *ifs*.